

A Note on This Book

This book comprises the most important chapters from my German book, "Gottes Gnade ist das kostbarste Geschenk kostenlos jedoch sehr kostspielig" (God's Grace Is the Most Precious Gift, Free Yet Very Costly), published by Rediroma Verlag. I have personally selected and translated these key chapters, attempting to ensure a good quality translation, though some parts may have been more machine-assisted.

My initial plan was to create an e-book with the help of a publisher. However, I later realized it would be better to offer a free resource. This led to the idea of sharing it via a link and then, of course, distributing that link widely.

It is my hope that this work will touch hearts.

Personal Statement of the Author

I would like to share personal experiences that shaped my understanding of grace. One of these moments revealed to me how deeply God can sanctify a person — for I saw something of His glory. This vision complements the truths of Scripture and confirms the inner richness of grace: that it is essential for God to dwell within us through grace, and that through this we are glorified beyond all measure. I have experienced this.

I saw how God's infinite mercy and holiness became visible when I perceived the presence of God within a person who was deeply connected to Him. It is important to clarify: I did not see a human face or a form, but rather a spiritual essence — and what I saw was an unspeakably beautiful, divine **Anteilnahme**, which appeared alive and full of holiness.

This occurred in a moment when someone showed concern for me — visibly and later admitted — and in that moment I recognized something immeasurable and holy in that concern. I understood: it was God's very nature. Through this encounter I grasped the infinite intensity of God's goodwill, which is rooted in His **Anteilnahme** — a German word for empathy, which I saw as a **living reality**, as a **living word**. It was revealed to me in such a deeply empathetic way that everything we experience is also experienced within this **Anteilnahme**.

Since I am German, and because God's nature revealed itself to me through the German word **Anteilnahme**, I wish to keep this word in the

English translation. It is part of the experience as it was revealed to me. I saw **Anteilnahme** as a living word and as a living reality. In this **Anteilnahme**, I saw absolute empathy—everything I go through, whether good or bad, is also experienced by **Anteilnahme**. In summary, I saw **Anteilnahme** as a spiritually alive word, and it embodied the literal meaning of the word **Anteilnahme**, which I can roughly translate as empathy. It touched me deeply, and the sheer intensity of it moved me even more. I realized that even a lesser measure would have been glorious—but this intensity made it immeasurably more beautiful.

The same applies to all other German words I refer to later. They remain in German because they are part of what was shown to me.

And within this **Anteilnahme**, I saw something else that struck me deeply: the German the living word **Freundlichkeit** — not only as a word, but also in the sense of **being friendly**. It is hard to explain, because it appeared both as a word and as that which **Freundlichkeit** is in essence — **living, friendly, real, and in excess**. Because of this, the beauty of **Freundlichkeit** was so overwhelming that I became more than reverent. This **Freundlichkeit** was so full of glory, so overflowing, that I knew: it could not be exaggerated, improved, or captured in human praise. It simply was. **Holy. Divine. Glorious.** I understood that in this **übermäßige Freundlichkeit**, I had seen an infinite power of glory — one that goes beyond what words of praise can express by an infinite measure. Human words of praise — except for divine attributes such as **holy** — would not only be an understatement, but a mockery of the glory of this divine empathy, which revealed itself to me in the living word **Freundlichkeit**, expressed in English as kindness.

I realized that this **Anteilnahme** contains an indescribably glorious fullness. Therefore, I can say from experience: God can fill us completely, and He is truly perfect, because His holiness — His inner beauty — has no limits. His exceedingly infinite **Freundlichkeit**, which is rooted in the nature of His **Anteilnahme**, is described in the Bible as the Sun of Righteousness. When God dwells in the heart, we radiate this Sun of Righteousness, and live truly godly and righteous lives, because we are filled with His glorious holiness. This is why it matters to God that His holy nature lives in us through grace. The fact that I saw God's nature and realized that it is not only sinless, but infinitely glorious, moved me beyond words.

Through this experience I began to understand what it truly means when the Bible says: God is holy and glorious. I also understand the meaning of God's love more deeply because of this experience. I am certain that many people equate the word **love** with an uncontrollable feeling of affection. But I believe the Bible means something different by **love**. According to the Bible, love is the sum of divine characteristics such as gentleness or **Freundlichkeit**. And God's character traits are unchanging qualities of His being. God's attributes are stable. Whether He is angry or not, He remains infinitely benevolent.

However, I have not only seen the good, but also evil in people who never treated me well, indeed abused me, and I can say that I was deeply traumatized by the ugliness of sin. It truly is worse than the worst disease, and it *is* the worst disease. It was all worth it to God to redeem us from this spiritual illness and to grant us His holiness in return. In this sense, there is nothing more irrational than not taking His grace seriously.

Foreword

In this foreword, I want to provide an overview of this book and explain what motivated me to write these texts. Through these writings, I aim to introduce my readers to God's grace. I myself know that grace has an indescribable value and I want to convince the reader of this, because without God's grace, we lead a meaningless life. Peter therefore reminded believers that they led a meaningless life before their lives changed through grace. He wrote: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors." The Bible tells us: God wants to enrich us through grace and thus grant us a perfect purpose in life. According to the Bible, grace glorifies us with indescribably rich gifts of grace. (Paul summarized these as the fruits of the Holy Spirit). The glory of the gifts of grace is so outstanding that Paul even spoke of "incomparably great power for us who believe" in Ephesians, saying: "that you may know what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power."

It is my heartfelt desire that more and more people experience God's grace and the glorious riches of grace that the Bible describes to us. However, to even obtain God's grace and experience its glorious riches, it is important to understand it. And so, my texts aim to answer the following questions: Under what conditions do we receive grace? What does grace do to us, or how does it manifest in our conduct? What does grace accomplish from God's perspective? The answers to these questions are found in the Bible and shed light on how God's grace is to be understood. Nevertheless, there is a need for clarification about God's grace, simply because God's grace is often preached one-sidedly or even incorrectly in terms of content, and some things from the Bible are misunderstood. In my subsequent texts, I therefore explain difficult-to-understand Bible passages about Paul. With this, I want to make it clear: Paul, like Jesus, taught that God's grace upholds the law.

Furthermore, in the following texts, I explain that Paul and James taught Jesus' perfect love and mercy as the meaning and purpose of the law, and considered the law fulfilled in Jesus' love and mercy. With these explanations, I want to refute the unbiblical view that God, through His grace, sets aside justice and pardons us at the expense of justice.

Many believers think that Jesus died on the cross because God wants to be lenient with us. They believe that God's grace has no sin-redeeming power and justifies us before God in sin. They thus misunderstand that grace serves a new beginning – indeed, a new life that reflects Jesus. Therefore, behind their pious facade, they at best lead an "averagely decent" life. But Jesus essentially said: You cannot expect a reward with a morality of mere decency. In His Sermon on the Mount, He said: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." As the giver of grace, He said that God's grace would not disregard justice. For this reason, my texts deal with the validity of the commandments and, above all, highlight the Sermon on the Mount as a universally valid and binding moral code. It shows the true meaning of the commandments. This clarifies that we, as Christians, are not permitted to sin in any way, not even in secret. And thus, it becomes clear that grace neither abolishes nor relativizes God's standard, His law. My texts are intended to biblically prove this fact and thus serve to refute a false understanding of grace: the understanding of **cheap grace**.

The term "cheap grace" was coined by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who essentially said: "We cannot dismiss God's grace as cheap junk. The price of grace shows: grace is valuable from the perspective of the giver of grace. Jesus would not have paid with His life through His death on the cross for cheap junk. Therefore, grace is not thrown at everyone as if it were shoddy goods and had cost nothing. God's grace is not cheap, but costly grace. And only those who understand and acknowledge this can obtain grace." What Dietrich Bonhoeffer meant is: only those who appreciate the cost of the redemptive act and thus Jesus' atoning sacrifice will receive God's grace. All promises of grace, such as the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and reconciliation with God, are only for people who genuinely ask for grace by accepting Jesus' sacrifice out of true repentance for their own sins. In this way, they are cleansed from all sin, freed from their inclination to sin, and reconciled with God.

Jesus' redemptive act thus does not serve universal reconciliation, for otherwise the whole world would be reconciled with God, with God exercising leniency towards all sinners thanks to Jesus' sacrifice and foregoing justice. But according to the Bible, God's grace is given to us for the sake of **justice**, because God cannot tolerate our sins and His justice is indissoluble. The sole purpose of grace is the **redemption of sin**, so that we may realign our lives according to God's will. Grace specifically reveals God's unyielding demand for justice. The punishment for our sin debt, which stands irreconcilably between us humans and God, was imposed on Jesus so that our debt might be paid through Jesus' atoning work, His death on the cross, and God could forgive us. God's grace credits us, in faith, with the merit of Jesus, His death on the cross, and is thus an unmerited goodness that justifies us before God. Jesus' sacrifice shows how much God condemns sin and that every sin demands its toll.

And so, we ridicule God's grace if we reduce it to an acquittal from sin, because the cost of the redemptive act aims at a **turning to God**, and thus grace requires our willingness to turn. Otherwise, the cost of the redemptive act would be wasted from God's perspective. Anyone who does not want to turn away from sin implies that they do not need an atoning sacrifice for the redemption of sin and scoffs at God's goodness. (After all, according to the Bible, we are all sinners in need of redemption). Grace is therefore not intended for ungrateful scoffers who refuse to see this. The Bible says: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked." This means: Anyone who nods yes to grace and at the same time wants to let God be a "nice guy" does not deserve grace. For with such an attitude, we insult the giver of grace with ingratitude by reducing His grace to an admission ticket to the Kingdom of Heaven. And so, we must not take God's grace for granted, nor deny the meaning of grace, which is to turn away from sin and turn to God. We owe Jesus gratitude for His grace. And thus, it is important to understand: **God expects a response to grace**. We are to reciprocate for the redemptive act of the giver of grace because of His sacrificial love. God expects us, therefore, to walk worthy of our Christian calling, as it says in Ephesians. Paul told us this in the following words: "You were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies." The phrase "you were bought at a price" means that the Christians addressed belonged to Jesus as "purchased property" through a surrender of their lives to Jesus. And so, as the price of redemption, they lived not for themselves, but for Jesus, by committing their lives to Jesus. The Bible thus tells us that we belong to Jesus through redemption from sin. This is the appropriate price for the redemption of sin, which we owe Jesus out of gratitude for His grace. Paul reminded the Corinthians of this in the following words: "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."

The price of grace, therefore, is that we live for God and fulfill our calling as redeemed people (or as Paul put it, walk worthy of our calling), which consists of following Jesus. In this way, we honor the cost of the redemptive act. If we do not understand this truth, we want God's grace to be less than the value of its precious price, and we cheapen what God does not allow. God insists that His grace is perfectly valuable and costly, as it came at an incredibly high price in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, and accordingly, we should consider it valuable. Moreover, grace deserves perfect appreciation—beyond the redemption of sin—because it grants us a relationship with God by gaining a new life in Christ. This means: Jesus Himself dwells in us under grace, grants us His divine righteousness and identity, and unites us with God because He Himself is one with God. Precisely therein lies the perfect value of grace: the insurmountably high value of grace depends on Jesus Himself. And He in person is our only righteousness before God that brings us salvation, as His righteousness fulfills the divine moral demand. Therefore, it is true: grace was not only acquired for us by Jesus through His sacrifice on the cross, but it is also made available to us in His person. He is the personified grace of God, and all promises of grace are inseparably linked with Him. This means: divine grace not only includes Jesus, it is given to us solely through Jesus.

Grace flows from Jesus, because only when He comes into our lives do we experience grace. This is important to understand, because without Jesus we could not turn back to God, experience sanctification and change, and thus not turn away from sin. If we rely on Jesus' sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins without letting Jesus, the giver of grace, into our lives, we will never experience God's grace. Jesus is therefore the goal of grace. He is the precious pearl of the Gospel (the message of salvation that we are saved by grace) that justifies the high price of grace. Thus, God expects us to turn to Jesus and let Him into our lives.

However, if we want to live out our own ego at a distance from Jesus, we despise grace and will reap God's wrath. Moreover, we scoff at grace if we call ourselves Christians without orienting ourselves to Jesus. For the name "Christian" alone refers to Christ and thus to Jesus. It is therefore perfectly obvious that we can truly call ourselves Christians only if we think and act Christ-centered. The name "Christian" becomes a meaningless label if we do not understand this and merely adorn ourselves with the name Christian based on the hope of cheap grace. Mere lip service and outward worship of Jesus are also of no use to us and bring no grace if our heart does not align with it. Our confession of Jesus is dishonest and worthless to God if we confess Jesus without allowing ourselves to be touched by Jesus. Therefore, Jesus said that praise with the lips without heartfelt worship is an abomination to Him. And so, we should place Jesus at the center of our faith instead of flaunting the name Christian. The Bible therefore shows us that Jesus does not secure our salvation through lip service, but that we should secure our salvation by putting Him above all our concerns, since our salvation comes from Him and salvation is found only in His name. And so, the Bible promises us salvation by calling upon the name of Jesus for our redemption from guilt, if this happens with an honest heart (see 2 Tim 2:22). The Bible thus makes it clear that without a complete appreciation for the person of Jesus, we are not worthy of His grace in God's eyes. And therefore, we should take an example from true apostles of the Bible, who, out of appreciation for Jesus, were so devoted to Him that they risked their lives for Jesus. They preferred to die as martyrs for Jesus rather than deny faith in Jesus. Paul serves as an example of such an apostle.

He said: "Everything is worthless compared to Jesus." If we attribute such a high value to the person of Jesus, we appropriately consider God's grace to be costly and thus prove ourselves worthy of receiving the precious pearl of grace, which is Jesus Himself. After all, a precious pearl is only given to someone who values it. And thus, a precious pearl is wasted if one gives it to someone who overlooks its value, carelessly discards it, or tramples on it. Therefore, we should not allow the precious pearl of the Gospel to be trampled, in the proverbial sense, by casting it before swine. With the words "Do not cast your pearls before swine," Jesus admonished His disciples that they should move on if people did not want to know about Him and His precious grace. Jesus thus made it clear: We should not even try to evangelize people who do not want to know about the preciousness of grace and at most affirm a cheap grace. The

Gospel must therefore not be distorted by the teaching of cheap grace, so that the pearl of the Gospel is not given away. Moreover, it is irresponsible to teach that God's grace is cheap, because the misconception of cheap grace lulls us into false assurance of salvation. Belief in cheap grace also makes us lazy and lukewarm, as we hope in cheap grace and think we owe God nothing but lip service.

Moreover, belief in cheap grace leads to justifying our sins through Jesus' sacrifice. Thus, the misconception of cheap grace seduces us into willful sinning and serves as an excuse for an ungodly life. It's not for nothing that Bonhoeffer said: "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church," because through belief in cheap grace, churches are filled with hypocrites. These hypocrites dishonor Jesus. This creates a Christianity that risks nothing for Jesus. A Christianity that believes in cheap grace brings Jesus into disrepute, thereby staining the Christian faith. Such a Christianity consists only of pious hypocrites and will never genuinely confess Jesus. And in times of real moral decay, one cannot rely on such a Christianity that believes in cheap grace. Rather, in such a time, it becomes clear that Christian values do not matter to such a Christianity. Although Jesus commissioned us to follow Him and bring light into the darkness of the world, such a Christianity will do nothing against the injustices of the world—certainly not at its own peril. And so, during Hitler's unjust regime, it became clear how deeply the belief in cheap grace had permeated the churches, which is why, within the church at that time, Hitler's injustice was largely presented as righteous.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was deeply shaken by this. He criticized that church leaders in the Nazi regime, out of opportunism, wanted nothing to do with their Christian responsibility and conformed to the regime. Dietrich Bonhoeffer resisted Hitler's injustice due to his Christian conviction, because as a theologian, he recognized: Faith in Jesus is worthless if Jesus' righteousness is denied. This happens when believers say yes to every injustice out of opportunism. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, therefore, stood by Christian values in the Nazi regime. Out of indignation at the abuses in the Nazi regime, Bonhoeffer founded the Confessing Church. The Confessing Church was an opposition movement of evangelical Christians against attempts to synchronize the doctrine and organization of the German Evangelical Church (DEK) with National Socialism. But not only through this did he offer resistance; Dietrich Bonhoeffer used foreign contacts to overthrow Hitler's regime. He participated in coup plans against the Hitler regime to stop Hitler's injustice. He was also involved in a secret operation that successfully brought 14 Berlin Jews to safety in Switzerland. And even after his incarceration due to his discovered resistance, he did not change his attitude. He was sent to a concentration camp in Flossenbürg and sentenced to death.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer faced the tragic fate of execution, which affected him less than the injustice of the Nazis. Thus, he paid with his life for Christian values and the belief in a costly grace. Before his death, he

wrote a book called "Resistance and Submission." He also wrote a book about true discipleship during his resistance to the Nazis, which sheds light on how costly God's grace is and how true Christians must not bow to the injustices of the world.

Despite his warning words in his books, the misconception of cheap grace still prevails in present-day Christianity. This should shake us and make us think. For through Dietrich Bonhoeffer's example, we recognize how important belief in a costly grace can be to prevent great global injustice. Even if Dietrich Bonhoeffer could not overthrow Hitler's regime, he did much to prevent Hitler's injustice and thereby showed courage. He acted admirably according to his conscience and leaves us an example of a true Christian who warned us against dismissing God's grace as cheap. And so, we should be aware that we can halt the moral decay of our world by joining Dietrich Bonhoeffer's perspective and refusing—even at the risk of our lives—to betray Christian values. In this way, we profess Jesus. This loyalty is deserved by Jesus, for His sacrificial death warrants our most heartfelt praise.

So, I want to appeal to all readers to reflect on the person of Jesus. And I hope that more and more people will recognize how valuable the person of Jesus is, and therefore place Jesus at the center of their lives, which includes following Jesus. Otherwise, Jesus will not consider us worthy of being counted among His disciples, and we will lose our eternal life in blessedness with God. Jesus' words show this in Matthew 16:24-25: "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for My sake will find it.'" This passage shows: Just as Jesus sacrificially bore His suffering on the cross, we, in discipleship, should be willing to carry our own cross (figuratively speaking). According to this Bible passage, we gain new imperishable life in the person of Jesus by losing our own life and thus our sinful identity through self-denial. Without self-denial, which is shown in the readiness to give up everything or make sacrifices for following Jesus (and thus to take up every cross of suffering), we will not be saved by grace. In this sense, I want to destroy all illusions that Jesus is content with a lukewarm Christianity.

According to the Bible, there is no Jesus who leaves us as we are and smuggles us into heaven. However, such an unbiblical Jesus exists in the minds of many people who feel comfortable in the Christian faith. They do not know the true Jesus, who reached out to sinners but at the same time told them: "Go now and leave your life of sin." The Bible describes a Jesus who essentially tells us: I am Lion and Lamb. Do not be deceived. Jesus Himself showed two sides. He is not only the Lamb who came for us and

died on the cross. He also lives up to His "hard" side as the Lion, by judging all sinners in His claim to dominion. The true Jesus is radically negative towards sin and will therefore, according to His own statement, judge us by His word. At the same time, He is a Lamb for all who serve Him meekly. The true Jesus can never be confined to a dead religious system. For that, He is faithful and righteous; He will keep all promises. And what He promises us is worth following Him for. Through Him, we will never suffer want, but the absolute opposite. Jesus' disciples felt no lack in His presence—even when they followed Him without money bags and without material possessions. Jesus, as the source of our salvation and our blessedness, promises us the following: "Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for Me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life." Mark 10:28-30.

So Jesus said that we will receive back many times over what we give up for Him. The costs of the redemptive act are therefore worth the price of grace, which consists of us living for God instead of for our ego and thus proving ourselves worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven. And therefore, we should not shrink from the demand of self-denial that Jesus places on us in order to obtain His grace. No sacrifice should be too great for us to gain new life in Jesus. Nor should we ever long for cheap grace, as this would mean disregarding Jesus and not appreciating the costs of the redemptive act. Moreover, the teaching of cheap grace will never comfort us. Certainly, the teaching of cheap grace sounds tempting to people who want to reach the Kingdom of Heaven on an easy path.

Finally, according to the cheap grace doctrine, nothing is required for our salvation except a superficial Christian facade. But the doctrine of cheap grace gives us no meaning in life, so our lives become aimless without Christian values. How sad it would be if true Christian faith did not change us, and Jesus saved us in our miserable sinfulness? Thus, according to the cheap grace doctrine, Jesus would be a servant of sinners, who would not free us from our alienation from God, but merely save us from God's wrath over our sins. Moreover, a God who gives us grace cheaply would not be exalted above humans and nothing more than an all-forgiving grandfather unworthy of reverence. Therefore, in my subsequent texts, I want to clarify: Only through Jesus does our life become valuable and purposeful, in which, thanks to His grace, we can live in friendship with God and be called children of God. And so, as Christians, we should be glad that God does not give us cheap grace, for cheap grace would not fill us with the glory of God and His love. We could draw no strength or courage from cheap grace. I want to express in Bonhoeffer's words how cheap grace is to be evaluated: "Cheap grace means grace as a handout, forgiveness thrown away, comfort thrown away, sacrament thrown away." In this sense, the Bible shows us: Christ Himself is too valuable to accept cheap grace. Jesus promises us more than cheap grace could offer us. And everyone who gets to know Jesus will learn to love Him so much that they would never think of devaluing

His grace. The Bible says: Because Jesus died for us out of love, we, as the redeemed, return His love, because the power to love comes from grace itself. And whoever has truly recognized Jesus' worth will rejoice and exult in Him and the richness of His gifts of grace in all situations of life.

Introduction

I have decided to write texts about the true value of grace in order to expose false Christians who adorn themselves with the label "Christian." My aim is to show that the doctrine of cheap grace is a heresy. The doctrine of cheap grace claims that we live in freedom to do or leave undone whatever we want because the cross of Christ releases us from all moral responsibility. Many people, due to this false belief in cheap grace, are on the broad path to damnation without realizing it, for the broad path has a large Christian sidewalk. On this broad path to damnation are people who, by outward lip confession, count themselves among the redeemed of the Lord Jesus but do not want to align their lives with Jesus. They talk about sanctification and a new life in Jesus — but because of a lack of self-denial, they are in truth only hypocrites and superficially pious.

They are not true disciples who value the new life in Christ and therefore deny their own lives. Jesus clearly said that it is not enough to call Him "Lord, Lord" outwardly, but only those who walk through the narrow gate and therefore live according to the Sermon on the Mount, because they do His will, are saved. For this reason, Jesus asked rhetorically: "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I will?" Jesus never promised us that we can be disciples without asking for God's will, which is expressed in His commandments and summed up in the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus' love and mercy. Therefore, Jesus never gave us false hopes regarding our salvation.

He set no wellness conditions for discipleship among His followers. When Jesus called someone to be a disciple, He did not call for outward piety, but for following Him and thus stepping into His footsteps. True believers are therefore only those who come to Christ to follow Him, not just with their lips but with heart and deed, even if it sometimes means dying as a persecuted Christian for Jesus. This is also illustrated by the parable of the sower, in which a sower scatters seed that represents the gospel. According to this parable, the gospel seed falls on different soils, which are infertile because they are overgrown with weeds, thorns, or stones, and on good, fertile soil. The gospel seed can only penetrate good, fertile soil, grow, and bear fruit. It falls in vain on bad or hard soils, where it simply bounces off. The soil represents our heart. This shows: our heart must be prepared for the gospel, because the seed of the gospel needs, to penetrate the heart and bear fruit that changes and saves us, an open heart — the heart-soil of self-denial. In a hard heart, which is not open to

God's gospel and is symbolized by rocky, stony, or thorny soil, the seed of the gospel cannot penetrate.

According to this parable, the seed is stolen by the enemy of God before it can bear fruit and salvation. In some people with a hard heart, which Jesus compared to a rock, the gospel evokes an emotional positive response because they intellectually believe the gospel. Yet they are not saved, as they cannot withstand the pressure and persecution that comes because of the gospel. Jesus compared a heart overgrown with weeds or thorns to one where love for earthly things and riches still rules the heart. In such hearts, the seed of the gospel cannot penetrate, grow, or flourish because the old life has never been put off. This illustrates: the gospel must not only be recognized as a seed for the new life in Christ, but it must also be planted in us for our salvation. Jesus therefore pointed out that a new life in Him requires the death of our self, because the seed of the gospel can only be planted in a heart that is open to Jesus and the gospel. He compared this to a grain of wheat that must first die so that it can bring forth new life and fruit.

In other words, Jesus said we are only rooted in the gospel when we live completely for God, surrendering our self, and thus have no will independent of God. Only then does the seed of the gospel sprout in us, bringing forth new life and salvation. Whoever clings to their sin is not redeemed, because they are not willing to give their self to death and therefore cannot receive a new life of grace for their own salvation. Rather, such a person is entangled in selfishness.

It is of no use to such a person to appeal to the gospel while sinning, because grace does not grant freedom to sin. True grace of God gives us freedom to live a life according to God's will. True Christian freedom does not mean human arbitrariness but serving God. According to the Bible, Christian freedom means exactly the opposite of what adherents of cheap grace understand by freedom, who hope for forgiveness of sins without true repentance. True Christian freedom is according to the Bible bound only to Jesus, who demands submission under His authority and full acknowledgment of His will, which is expressed in the commandments. Such an obedient attitude, leading to the acknowledgment of God's commandments, Paul called a spiritual mindset, because it comes from the Spirit of Christ (the nature of Jesus). We live in this spiritual mindset when we are submitted to Jesus as Lord as a consequence of our salvation. Otherwise, we may not call Jesus our Lord. "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3).

Saving faith thus redeems us to obedience, as it grants us a new spiritual orientation through inner renewal. This is the purpose of grace and the reason for our salvation according to the Bible. It is therefore no Christian freedom privilege to disregard Jesus' will or to sin at will and ignore the commandments, since sin is a transgression of the law and thus a disregard for divine justice. John wrote about this: "Sin is the transgression of the law." Taking the "freedom to sin" is rebellion against God, because grace is not a license to sin but frees us radically from sin

(see Galatians). "But those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Furthermore, the Letter to the Romans says: "We know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we would no longer be enslaved to sin; for whoever has died to sin has been freed from sin." According to the true understanding of salvation, it is indispensable for our salvation to be freed from our sinful nature. Only those who have died to sin are, as Paul said, freed from the judgment of sin, which is death and condemnation. Even those who do not want to accept this, who call themselves free thinkers and think they are their own bosses (because they do not submit to Jesus' will), are slaves of themselves without realizing it. If we think we can live in complete independence of Jesus' will, this only reflects our egoism, and we are on the wrong path, because egoism is incompatible with Christian freedom. Those entangled in selfishness are slaves to sin and not saved, since our salvation requires the renunciation of our selfish will.

For this reason, Jesus clearly said that He came to free us from slavery to sin and not to make us free to sin without punishment. He said in effect: "Everyone who sins is a slave. But in Me you are free, for in Me you are no longer a slave to sin, but children of God who do His will and therefore may live forever." Yet many overlook such Bible verses, because the message of cheap grace is pleasing to the ears, as cheap grace saves us without having to change. This doctrine of cheap grace is so successful because it allows us to indulge all our desires, which is the goal of the sinful human nature. Thus, cheap grace appeals to a sinner who does not want to admit the need for salvation from sin and yet likes to hear about eternal life by grace.

Because the gospel of cheap grace sounds enticing to such a sinner, some do not even question this gospel, as this unbiblical gospel intoxicates their senses.

The Bible predicted this as follows: "A time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but, according to their own desires, will gather teachers to themselves to tickle their ears and will turn away their ears from the truth and turn aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4; cf. 2 Thess. 2:9,12). Peter wrote more about this in chapter 2, verses 18-20: "They speak arrogantly, flattering people with sensual desires, those who have just escaped from those who live in error. They promise freedom, while they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whoever is overcome by something is enslaved by it. If they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ but are again entangled and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first."

This passage makes clear: those who think they can sin because of grace have a false concept of freedom in God's grace. Peter said about false teachers who promise freedom to sin that they themselves are slaves of corruption (v.19). As these texts show, we should not believe everything

the modern grace teachers say. Among them are many true shepherds and good preachers, but also wolves in sheep's clothing. We must beware of them according to Jesus, because they may harm our souls through false teachings, which can be worse than the damage done by obvious enemies.

After all, our soul is more precious than our body and all our possessions. For this reason, it is important to expose false teachings about grace that can harm our souls. To reveal the true meaning of grace and expose false doctrines about grace, I have written this text. It aims, through many biblical references and arguments, to show that it is impossible to misuse the atonement of Jesus for cheap grace without falling into heresy and eternal damnation.

Therefore, I hope this book will open eyes to the true doctrine of grace and save many from cheap grace's deadly trap.

The True Gospel in Contrast to Cheap Grace (Abbreviated Version)

There is only one true gospel that leads to salvation. What I call the "gospel of cheap grace" is a man-made, false message that is wrongly presented as the biblical gospel. However, a false gospel cannot save, and Scripture warns us against such teachings in the end times that teach a false Jesus.

In this text, I want to warn against this false gospel by contrasting it with the true gospel. Many people have only rudimentary knowledge of the

biblical gospel and are therefore susceptible to misleading teachings. You probably know that Jesus died for our sins and rose again, and that his salvation happened by grace so that you are justified through faith. You know that God forgives sins through faith in Jesus and that you are justified despite past sins.

Yet even if you know all this, you may never have encountered the true gospel. Maybe you heard that Jesus invites everyone, but you were never told that Jesus demands full devotion and does not want indifferent “admirers.” Faith in Jesus means believing in the radical biblical Jesus who tolerates no followers. Jesus clearly said that we must confess him under all circumstances if we want to be his disciples.

The true gospel teaches a radical Jesus who invites us but also clearly speaks against half-hearted Christianity. He can only save us if he is also our Lord. Jesus rejected people who wanted to follow him thoughtlessly, like the rich young man who was not willing to give up his wealth. Jesus demands that we commit ourselves to him uncompromisingly and that he is everything to us. We should give up all self-interests for his sake and place all our hope in him to muster the necessary self-denial. Jesus said in essence: “Take me completely or not at all.” He never tried to persuade people who were not ready for self-denial and preferred to remain alone rather than gain a half-hearted disciple.

The story of the rich young man shows that the Bible teaches a radical Jesus who does not negotiate and even rejects lukewarm, pious people who seek him. The rich young man recognized Jesus as the Messiah but missed the kingdom of heaven because Jesus claimed radical lordship over his life, which he could not fulfill due to lack of self-denial. Anyone who teaches a Jesus who denies this total lordship claim preaches an unbiblical, watered-down, and thus false gospel.

This truth is frightening for selfish people who do not want to submit. Many therefore turn away from the true gospel and prefer a message that teaches a Jesus without this lordship claim. But grace is precisely precious because it subjects us to the lordship of Jesus, who directs our lives into divine paths. Paul said: “Everything else seems worthless to me compared to the priceless gain of knowing Jesus Christ as my Lord.” For Paul, life was valuable because Jesus was his Lord.

If we surrender to Jesus as Lord, we will correspond to his mindset, for “whoever binds himself to the Lord is one spirit with him” (1 Corinthians 6:17). The meaning and purpose of my book is to show you that God cannot offer his grace beneath the value of the person of Jesus and does not advertise it as “cheap goods.” Grace is not thrown to everyone who indulges in pious wishful thinking.

On the contrary: We make God angry when we call ourselves Christians but are not willing to align ourselves with Jesus and his word. The letter of Jude warns against godless people “who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny God, the only Lord, and our Lord Jesus

Christ.” Whoever wants to misuse God’s grace for a licentious life believes in a false gospel.

The core of the true gospel of grace is that Jesus died to atone for our sins because man is not capable of doing so. Our sins are forgiven when we repent of them in faith in Jesus and accept his sacrifice. The purpose of God’s grace is not only salvation from guilt but also our sanctification. (Hebrews 10:14: “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being sanctified.”)

The Bible teaches that grace leads to an inner renewal. Whoever accepts Jesus’ sacrifice is cleansed from sin and loses their sinful nature. God then dwells in the hearts of the truly converted, and they walk in God’s nature, which is love. We receive a new nature through grace. Paul said: “Through Jesus, everything is new; we are a completely new creation. The old has passed away.” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Our transformation through grace affects our lifestyle. Paul asked rhetorically: “Do you not know that God’s grace leads you to repentance?” Repentance and turning follow from God’s grace. By the power of grace, we lead a God-pleasing life because faith in the true Jesus grants us his divine righteousness (Romans 3:21). Peter wrote: “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.”

According to the true gospel, grace causes us to live a life separated to God in holiness. Dedication to Jesus and discipleship are central points. Herein lies the difference between God’s gospel and the gospel of cheap grace, whose proponents reduce the doctrine of the cross to Jesus gladly forgiving.

The gospel of cheap grace states that God absolutely wants to forgive us even in a sinful state if we formally appeal to grace. Visible sanctification is supposedly unnecessary because God’s grace saves exclusively in sin, and man does not need to strive for higher things. According to this false gospel, alignment to Christ to imitate his selfless life path is unnecessary. Grace allegedly causes no measurable change, and forgiveness is not tied to repentance and turning.

The spread of the gospel of cheap grace must be stopped because it is a powerless message of human wisdom that leads to apostasy. It consists of half-truths and lies and contradicts our mission to teach everything Jesus taught. We are guilty if we withhold an important part of the gospel or recklessly accept a false gospel. In the following texts, I will biblically justify that God’s gospel is diametrically opposed to the man-made gospel of cheap grace.

Misunderstandings about the Concept of Grace

I would like to shed light on the concept of biblical grace, because the biblical concept of grace is often misunderstood. This is partly due to the fact that the biblical concept of grace does not coincide with the common meaning of the word in everyday language. Therefore, I would first like to point out the term grace as it is used in everyday language in order to indicate incorrect associations from everyday usage with the biblical concept of grace. In everyday language, grace is understood as benevolence and tolerance toward sin, which is based on kindness. For example, one speaks of “grace before the law” and means grace at the expense of the law through a benevolent judgment (due to tolerance of a sin that one does not want to punish out of pity for the offender).

The biblical concept of grace, however, has no connection whatsoever with tolerance toward a committed sin. Because the Bible tells us: God’s grace is not based on overlooking sin and does not consist of tolerance toward our sins. Therefore, the grace of God does not forgive us the punishment for our sins without consequences, because the punishment for our sins was imposed on Jesus. Grace does not manifest itself in overlooking sin. God’s grace manifests itself in granting grace before the law with regard to our committed sins. We experience kindness regarding the guilt of our committed sins when we accept Jesus’ atoning work. Grace declares us free because the punishment was carried out on Jesus. And thus we are undeservedly pardoned—but not at the expense of justice, but at the expense of a substitute who bears the punishment.

God’s grace proves itself in acquitting us and freeing us from guilt by Jesus paying for it. But it does not stop there. It enriches us because, on this basis, we are free from sin without burden. Thus, we can turn to God, because grace does not end at the point where we are freed from sin. It accomplishes a transformation into the image of Jesus, in which the true value of grace lies. Our forgiveness of sins would ultimately be completely pointless if

we did not turn to God. Therefore, the biblical word grace involves much more than benevolence and kindness. Unfortunately, many reduce the concept of grace to undeserved favor or kindness and benevolence, although the phrase “undeserved favor” does not fully describe the concept of grace, but rather outlines it. The term “undeserved kindness” as an explanation for grace falls short because one might think God’s grace would always turn to the recipient in an undeserved manner.

However, the term “undeserved kindness” does not mean arbitrary kindness. Thanks to grace, Jesus’ merit on the cross is credited to us, so that it is undeserved from our point of view. That grace cannot be earned by us changes nothing about the fact that Jesus earned and acquired it for us by a paid price. Therefore, God does not pour His grace out on sinners who want to challenge His kindness because they believe grace would, in principle, arbitrarily forgive all guilt. Nevertheless, some are of the opinion that they can claim grace to generally sin without punishment against God because grace is supposed to justify the sinner undeservedly.

Thus, many think that by faith in Jesus they are basically under the stream of salvation of grace, even if they sin. They do not understand in the slightest that grace also calls us to a life that honors God. This applies to followers of cheap grace. They reduce the meaning of grace to a lenient kindness of a God who even out of overflowing goodwill blesses and tolerates their sins, which is fundamentally wrong. Others limit God’s grace to its redeeming function from sin and do not recognize that it can also sanctify us by its purifying function from sin. Because of such reduced or even false views of grace, many do not understand its meaning and do not recognize that it calls us to a holy life. This leads to them being blind to the treasures lying on the throne of grace and not recognizing what blessings grace holds for us. God’s gifts of grace are spiritual gifts that prepare us for the heavenly realm so that we no longer live worldly but follow Jesus. But those who do not recognize this will not come to the throne of grace and miss receiving the heavenly gifts. This is the case with followers of cheap grace. Thus, they do not live in the calling of a true disciple and miss grace. By seeking grace as an end in itself, they will not even come to enjoy grace and taste its gifts. Those who seek grace as an end in itself cannot even come to the throne of grace to experience salvation, healing, and blessing from it. Therefore, it must be understood: God’s grace is not based on aimless benevolent kindness that is given to us through faith in Jesus.

It aims more to spare the sinner from his deserved punishment. It enriches us with the precious wealth of its spiritual riches. That grace is not exhausted in the word kindness can already be derived from the original word. Grace means not only favor but also gift according to the original word. The biblical expression grace is related to the words favor and gift. And to bring these two words together, one can say: God’s favor is shown in redeeming us from sin out of kindness and granting us divine justice. This establishes its price. Through grace, all gifts from the heavenly realm should be granted to us, which have an invaluable worth because we can glorify God with these gifts. So I would like to summarize the meaning of grace as follows: The task of grace is to bring us into agreement and union with the gracious God or to unite us with Him so that we turn to Him. At this point I would like to note: We do not need grace from God to find favor in the sense of goodwill with Him, because God’s nature is fundamentally benevolent and not dependent on our behavior and thinking.

It must be understood: Grace does not bring us kindness that is based on arbitrary indulgence. Nor does it transform the strict God into a kind God. Grace does not serve to change God to our advantage but to change us. It makes us pleasing to God and obtains God's favor toward us. It brings us blessings from the heavenly realm because it opens the gates to the heavenly realm. It aims to give us access to God so that we

come to the throne of all heavenly gifts and are gifted. Now, after this explanation of the meaning of the concept of grace, I would like to summarize what it means to be under grace and how grace should affect our lives. To be under grace means to live with God and to be allowed to be close to Him. Because grace helps us find our way back to God through the redemption from sin and thus make us blessed, since sinners can never find their way to God.

According to Psalm 5, we cannot be close to God if we despise His will and are evildoers. Therefore, it is nonsense to assume that grace would justify us as sinners before God and enable a community with God and a sinner. The Bible tells us clearly and distinctly: God's grace gives us fellowship with God because it frees us from sin and the inner inclination to sin, and thus we, as converted people, will not want to sin and normally will not commit deliberate sins in general. When we as honestly converted people sin, they are probably not truly planned sins. In addition, as honestly converted people, we are sad that we have sinned. Thus, as honestly converted people, we try not to sin and are ready to repent even for subconscious, inner sins. Thus, as honestly converted people, we orient ourselves to God's standard of values in order to honestly examine ourselves by this standard and ask whether we live in accordance with God. Because even converted people can sin occasionally without intention, as they do not always walk perfectly in grace. But a fundamentally sinful lifestyle that does not correspond to God's standard is not compatible with grace. So we cannot be under grace if we accept a sinful lifestyle, especially since deliberate sins cannot be forgiven by grace without inner insight.

According to John, only honestly confessed sins, which we admit as faults, are forgiven. And the end result is that we are purified, therefore also turn back (see 1 John 1:9). After a conversion, our goal should be to stop sinning and become pure inwardly, which is clearly evident from verse 1 John 2:1. It is thus not permitted under grace to take sin lightly. Only if we take sin seriously, rigorously reject it, and acknowledge that we owe God a holy life, can God grant us grace at all. We should therefore be aware that by virtue of grace we should lead a holy life. God's grace is ultimately more than a benevolent approach on God's part. It includes the gift of a new life, which is Christ Himself. This gift was purchased by Jesus, so it comes to us solely as a gift of faith, because we cannot earn or work for it, but can only accept it by faith. Thus, it is true that God's grace makes us righteous undeservedly and saves us by undeserved favor. Only through God's goodwill and His infinite love can we walk in grace in a new life (which is Christ Himself) and thereby become righteous.

However, grace by no means ignores God's justice, because it takes responsibility for our guilt of sin, washes us clean from all sin, and frees us from our sinful existence as well as sanctifies us. Therefore, there is no cheap grace that redeems us in sin. We demean grace if we say that it would redeem us in sin, because it is given to us to free us from sin and to sanctify us by giving us new life in Christ. It thus binds us to Christ and the new life in Him. God's grace therefore benefits only those who gratefully accept the new life in Christ and walk in it, so that they live Christlike. They become blessed by grace.

Biblical Objections Against Cheap Grace

1. The Atonement Act of Jesus is Mocked

The Bible tells us that for all who deliberately continue to sin, there remains no more sacrifice, because if we do not understand grace as an opportunity for repentance and want to persist in sin, we forfeit our salvation. As we read in 2 Peter chapter 2 about people who had once known the way of salvation but then got entangled again in sin. In 2 Peter chapter 2, it says that it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then turned away from the holy commandments delivered to them. See 2 Peter 2:21: "It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them."

Jesus' sacrifice is therefore meant for those who are grateful for the redemption from sin, who want to be cleansed from sin, and not just formally rely on Jesus' sacrifice. Even the animal sacrifices were only acceptable to God if they truly served the atonement of sins and were accepted for that purpose.

They aimed at cleansing the heart from sin so that the person would turn to God or live rightly again, and the animal sacrifices symbolized Jesus' death. Therefore, we must not take our sins lightly, because the Bible tells us: Our sins weigh so heavily before God that they require a bloody sacrifice to forgive our guilt. A bloody sacrifice creates the necessary atonement for the forgiveness of our guilt. The word "atonement" means in Hebrew the settling of a debt by paying an appropriate ransom.

Jesus' bloody sacrifice is the ransom for our sin debt so that we may be freed from our bondage of guilt. The blood of a sacrifice has atoning power because it costs a life, for the wages of sin is spiritual death and separation from God. Therefore, the debt of sin demanded, according to Deuteronomy 19:21, the life of a sacrifice as the price of sin. And of course, after the debt was paid, the person was not permitted to sin again.

This already shows that sacrifices never granted a general permission to sin. For this reason, animals were regularly sacrificed in the Old Testament, because the sin debt of the sinner always required a new sacrifice. (Jesus' sacrifice is unique because He was a better and perfect Lamb who can completely redeem us from sin and sanctify us). There was a whole sacrificial system with different offerings: burnt offerings, thank offerings, or grain offerings, and man was supposed to come into a right relationship with God through the sacrifices.

The whole Old Testament sacrificial system illustrated how terrible sin is in God's eyes, because God did not demand animal sacrifices out of bloodthirstiness. He demanded bloody animal sacrifices to free from guilt that arises from sin and hinders a relationship with Him. The sacrifices therefore had to be offered in a humble attitude. According to Numbers 15:27-31, there was no sacrifice for willful sins because without the insight of guilt no atonement can happen and no atoning means is effective.

The sacrifices were repeatedly criticized by the prophets of the Old Testament because the Israelites often applied the sacrificial laws without a sense of guilt to obtain forgiveness. In Hosea, God laments about animal sacrifices that do not serve repentance and therefore do not lead to obedience to God's commandments. It says in Hosea chapter 8 from verse 11:

"I have written for him the many things of my law, but they are counted as a strange thing. For they have made ready their heart like an oven, while they lie in wait; their baker sleeps all night; in the morning it burns like a flaming fire."

Through Jeremiah, God said: "I did not command your fathers concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices when I brought them out of Egypt, but this command I gave them: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people." (Jeremiah 7:22-23)

Hosea, who wrestled passionately for his people, proclaimed in God's name: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." In Amos chapter 5, God despises sacrifices when injustice continues and calls for justice instead. He said, "I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:21-24)

The prophet Isaiah 1:11 complained: "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats."

In Jeremiah chapter 6, God said He could not accept the sacrifices of the Israelites because His words were ignored and there was no attitude of obedience. Jeremiah chapter 7 also says God cannot accept sacrifices to atone for sins if the people persist in theft, murder, adultery, and idolatry.

In Micah, God made clear that ritual animal sacrifices without repentance or even human sacrifices—which were forbidden in Israel—angered God. Such offerings never corresponded to God's will, which consists in keeping His law rather than cultic efforts. In Micah 6, the rhetorical question is asked: "With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" The answer confirms God's only requirement: "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

This one sentence encompasses all of God's law. It contains the demand for a relationship with God as well as with fellow human beings, God's demand to keep His word, to be humble, to bow before God, to put your whole life under His guidance, and to love. This proves that God's intention regarding the animal sacrifices was an inner change. Since the animal sacrifices were a shadow of Jesus' sacrifice, it is obviously absurd to think that Jesus' sacrifice would serve as a pretext for sin.

The blood of the sacrificial animals had the same purpose of atonement as the shed blood of Jesus. It was meant to cleanse the sinner from his guilt, and the sinner had to seriously transfer his guilt onto the sacrificial animal for the sake of atonement. Only on this basis was forgiveness of sins possible, and that was the whole purpose of the animal sacrifices. God Himself never needed animal sacrifices; they were only necessary because man sinned.

Therefore, Psalm 51:18-19 says that God takes no pleasure in burnt offerings. A humble, broken spirit is, according to David, the only sacrifice pleasing to God. David wrote in Psalm 50:13 that he wants to offer praise to God, for that is better than drinking the blood of bulls. God will only forgive us when we acknowledge our guilt, because an atoning sacrifice fulfills its purpose only when it is followed by guilt awareness.

Ecclesiastes 4:17 puts it this way: "Keep your foot when you go to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know that they do evil."

Jesus said: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Therefore, these words from Proverbs 18:13 apply: "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."

2. Jesus' righteousness is misused against the commandments and thus against the Word of God in the doctrine of cheap grace

Since we are called to love as Christ did and to keep the commandments in this way, it would be nonsensical to assume that grace could be misused as a free pass to lawlessness. After all, God's grace cannot be directed against the Christian mission, which consists of loving. According to Scripture, love is so important that Paul says everything depends on love. He said that without love he would be nothing—even if he gave his life as a sacrifice or gave his money to the poor. Therefore, anyone who sacrifices their life out of religious zeal but without the motive of love deserves no recognition for their sacrificial death. But whoever lays down their life out of love, according to Jesus, is a truly devoted follower who imitates Jesus, since Jesus himself went to the cross out of love for us. Devout deeds without the motive of love are worthless. Yes, even faith without love is worthless according to Paul, even if it could move mountains, and it does not earn us any recognition before God, which proves: without love, we cannot please God, and only what we do out of love pleases God.

The whole purpose of grace therefore aims at love, which comes from faith and is poured into the hearts through grace. We should therefore feel compelled to love, according to Paul. The Christian command to love cannot be denied as a core message of Jesus, despite all attempts to twist Scripture, because it clearly emerges from the Bible. For example, Jesus is asked by a scribe:

“Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25)

An answer to this question is already found in the law of the Old Testament, the Torah (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18):

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27; cf. Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:29-31)

According to the Bible, the entire law depends on this commandment. However, proponents of cheap grace argue that grace abolishes God's moral demands or replaces them with a vague morality of love that entails no obligations. They basically say: Jesus abolished the law and instead commanded us love. It applies: Love and do what you want.

First, it must be objected that we cannot pit the nature of Jesus, which is defined by love, against God's commandments. After all, Jesus said of himself: “I keep the commandments of my Father.” Moreover, the motto “Love and do what you want” is incompatible with the biblical concept of love. Love may seem vague in human terms, but the Bible understands commanded love as an inner merciful attitude of the heart, which is shown in a perfect way of life. The true love Jesus spoke of is divine; it led Jesus all the way to Golgotha to die for us. According to Paul, this love is the ultimate goal of every commandment, as he wrote to Timothy. In 1 Corinthians 14:1 he wrote: “Let love be your highest goal.” The commandment to love thus demands an absolute highest standard of righteousness, which is why it can never replace or nullify the other moral commandments. Since the commandment of love includes and perfectly fulfills all other moral commandments of God, and our entire inner attitude of love depends on it, it is called the royal commandment. It is also related to the golden rule of the Sermon on the Mount: “Treat

others as you would like to be treated yourself." But beyond this moral principle, Jesus' love lets us think completely altruistically, because it gives us boundless goodwill. This goodwill makes the difference between true Christians and non-Christians. Such goodwill is expressed in selfless behavior and is the goal of grace. Jesus therefore demanded the willingness to humble oneself for others, in order to raise one's fellow human beings. Paul also said that we should regard fellow believers as higher than ourselves. He meant that we should have the greatness to put aside our own self for our fellow humans.

Thus, Jesus' claim to love is connected with the demand to imitate Jesus and lead a completely selfless life. From all these Bible passages, it can be seen that the Bible commands true love and thereby calls us to fulfill the entire moral law. The importance of the commandment to love is emphasized by the following Bible verses:

"And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." (1 John 4:16)

"May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ." (2 Thessalonians 3:5)

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (1 John 4:8)

"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (Mark 12:30)

"But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." (Ephesians 4:15)

"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7)

"Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." (Romans 13:10)

In Romans 13:8 ff., it becomes clear that we are to become obedient out of love. Paul said:

"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Since the commandment of love is to be realized through Jesus, grace can never grant freedom to sin. Thus, the Ten Commandments remain relevant in the New Testament. Examples are Matthew 4:10: "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve!" John wrote: "Children, keep yourselves from idols!" (1 John 5:21). John also wrote about the first commandment, which commands us to honor and worship God:

"And I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, 'You must

not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!’ For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Further Bible verses confirm the validity of the commandments in the New Testament, for example Revelation 19:10:

“And the dragon was angry with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” (Revelation 12:17)

Adultery is forbidden by the 10th commandment, and the place of this commandment in the New Testament is shown, for instance, by the following verse from James:

“You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason, ‘God jealously longs for the Spirit he has caused to dwell in us’?”

All these Bible passages prove that grace is not meant to serve a lawless life. And Jesus himself never incited lawlessness. Otherwise, he would be an accomplice of lawlessness and would have rejected the law himself. If Jesus were an accomplice of lawlessness, he would hardly have condemned lawlessness. In Mark 7, Jesus spoke of the Pharisees’ abolition of the Word of God, who through their human traditions tried to circumvent one of the Ten Commandments, namely the commandment “Honor your father and your mother.” They taught that it was right before God to dedicate money to the temple that was intended for the parents’ retirement (although at that time there was no pension, and the parents were dependent on the money).

I want to add a remark about the commandment “Honor your parents”: The appreciation that parents should be given in the form of honor does not change the fact that they should also appreciate their children in the same way, since these are fundamentally equal creatures (or even members of the body of Christ), and this should also be felt through the parents’ love. The golden rule that Jesus proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount requires parents to value their children as themselves and to regard them as fellow human beings (or children of God) with fundamentally equal human dignity. It happens that parents misinterpret or exploit the 4th commandment of the Decalogue to oppress their children and demand unconditional respect expressed as blind obedience. Unconditional obedience and respect belong only to God, as the Apostle Peter also says: “We must obey God rather than men.” So we should not misuse the Bible to justify the desire for self-exaltation. Jesus said: “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled.” We reap what we sow. And whoever is merciless and therefore does not treat their children well and mercifully will, according to James, receive merciless judgment.

The true gospel requires humility that followers of cheap grace do not have

Followers of cheap grace lack biblical humility, even if they outwardly kneel before God, because out of self-righteousness they refuse to repent. True biblical humility, on the other hand, means condemning one's sins, desiring to repent, thereby giving up self-righteousness and coming to Jesus with empty hands. As long as we cling to our sins, we cannot come inwardly humble, with empty hands, to Jesus and accept the gospel.

The true gospel can only be received with true humility — that is, with empty hands — because only an empty hand can be filled with God's grace and the new life that Christ gives. Whoever comes to Jesus to receive grace should have a broken heart. Whoever has a broken heart can receive grace because no pride or self-righteousness dwells in a broken heart.

With a broken heart, we can sincerely come to Jesus so that He fills us with His righteousness. After all, such a heart is empty regarding its own self-righteousness and makes room for the riches of grace.

The Bible compares a heart without self-righteousness to an empty vessel. An empty vessel can be filled. A vessel that is already full cannot take in anything new, because the new content would overflow and be lost. This image applies to our hearts: whoever is proud and self-righteous lacks an open and empty heart in which grace can dwell.

The Gospel of Cheap Grace Teaches a Casual Attitude Toward Sin. Therefore, It Denies That True Grace Calls Us to Take Responsibility and to Resist Sin to the Death.

Followers of cheap grace say that faith in Jesus justifies us in sin. But according to Paul, sin happens only through unbelief. He said in Romans 14: "Everything that does not come from faith is sin." Sin is thus a consequence of unbelief, and without faith we have no claim to grace. Therefore, sin is fatal and leads, just like unbelief, to damnation. After all, both are connected. It is therefore contradictory to assume that faith would justify us in sin. Moreover, the Bible clearly shows how much God condemns sin and that Jesus is not a servant of sin. The Bible tells us to resist sin to the point of bloodshed. In this sense, Paul admonished a congregation in Hebrews 12:4: "You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood in your struggle against sin."

He then quoted the verse that God disciplines (or corrects) His sons so that they may share in His glory. Obviously, the congregation no longer believed in God's punishing side and did not take sin seriously enough. It can be assumed that the addressed congregation tried to resist sin but did not realize how radical a turning away from sin is necessary. We should not only try to avoid sin but resist it under all circumstances. Only those who truly reject sin radically can hope for forgiveness of their committed sins.

Many Bible passages show that God does not forgive us if we treat sin lightly—see Lamentations 3:42 or Jeremiah 5:7. It is all the worse if we

convince others of cheap grace and thus lead them to sin. If this is the case, the following warning from Luke 17:1-2 applies: "He said to his disciples, 'Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come! It would be better for them to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around their neck than to cause one of these little ones to stumble.'"

How tragic it is to lead others into sin is also shown by the parallel passage Mark 9:42-48: "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out." The same is stated in Matthew 18:6-9:

"But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell fire."

The First Epistle of John also contains this admonition: "Whoever sins, rebels against God and His commandments."

Hebrews 10:26-32 says:

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

Therefore, as John wrote: "Whoever does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light."

We are therefore obligated to fight against sin. See the following Bible words: "Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:12-14)

Since we are to resist sin to the point of bloodshed, we are urged to be steadfast in faith, because only faith prevents falling into sin. As Paul expressed it, we should fight the good fight of faith to win the battle against sin. On the battlefield of the fight of faith, we should fight with spiritual weapons for the good and withstand all temptations and attacks with the breastplate of divine righteousness. We should wear the full armor of God to overcome sin and fight the good fight of faith, thus winning the victory prize of faith.

Followers of cheap grace, however, do not resist sin even a little, have already lost the fight against sin, and cannot possibly resist it to the death because they do not take sin seriously.

Belief in cheap grace ultimately leads to tolerance and trivialization of one's own sins, so followers of cheap grace are unwilling to resist sin or even fight against it. Therefore, they are not even willing to put on the spiritual armor of God to fight the faith battle and go to war against sin. They do not even recognize the necessity of the fight of faith.

Followers of cheap grace think that the victory prize of faith is given to them by cheap grace without having to prove themselves in their faith. They do not understand that grace calls us to resist sin to the death and that we must be willing to fight the good fight of faith. The result is that they are not prepared for the faith fight and perish without a fight because they do not understand that only those who overcome the world and endure the spiritual battle of faith will receive the victory prize of faith.

Moreover, they have a weak and dull faith because they have no passion for their faith. Only salty and living faith that ignites passion for Jesus is salvific, for from it comes strength and fighting spirit. With a dull faith that does not change us inwardly and does not lead to resistance against sin, we cannot and will not fight the good fight of faith. Therefore, with a dull faith we can never win the victory prize of faith or stand before God. A dull faith also cannot provide us with spiritual weapons such as the breastplate of righteousness and the shield of faith (see Ephesians 6) to resist the enemy armies of darkness.

Anyone who wants to stand before God with a dull faith is like a king who wants to face his enemies unarmed and without an army, while they attack him with a large army. No king would be so foolish and senseless not to prepare against a large army, and therefore Jesus said in Luke 14, from verse 31: "Suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace." Likewise, Jesus said, "Whoever does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:31-33)

Jesus wants to show with these words that the way of faith requires a fighting spirit and confirms that we are called to fight the fight of faith. Furthermore, Jesus' words show that we should put all our effort into fighting the good fight of faith with all passion because we cannot succeed otherwise. Therefore, we should fully commit to Jesus and follow Him, bearing the costs of discipleship.

We must realize that with a dull faith we have already lost because true faith calls us into discipleship, following, and the fight of faith. Only if we bear the cost of discipleship and become true disciples of Jesus, who understand the seriousness of the situation and the necessity of the faith fight, can we prove ourselves in faith. But those who believe in cheap grace will not understand this.

5. Grace cannot permit sinning because it kills sin

Followers of cheap grace say: We are allowed to sin. It only matters that we remain in Jesus. Scripture, however, opposes this by saying that we do not sin if we remain in Jesus. John wrote about this: "In Him there is no sin. Whoever remains in Him does not sin." (1 John 3:5-6) Moreover, we can only sincerely say that we are in Jesus if we follow Him. It is written: "Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did." (1 John 2:6) Yet many say it is self-deception to believe that Jesus can truly deliver us from sin. Many refer to the following Bible verse: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (Some translations say "sin" here, but "guilt" is probably the better translation.) This verse is supposed to prove that Christians are not delivered from sin. But this verse is not directed at converted people. John addressed unbelievers in this verse, which is why it is absurd to use it to prove the sinfulness of redeemed Christians. The fact that John was not speaking to redeemed Christians in the verse "If we claim to be without guilt (in some translations sin), we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" becomes clear from the entire context.

Therefore, I want to consider the entire context in 1 John:

"We have heard and now declare to you that God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without guilt, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word is not in us."

In this passage, John wanted to make clear that we stop sinning when we turn to Jesus. He immediately concluded this admonition with the words: "I write this so that you will not sin." (1 John 2:1) All this shows that John spoke to the unsaved to show them how they can be freed from their sin and stop sinning. John addressed people who did not even know the

gospel yet, because he taught them the doctrine of Jesus so they could share in the truth. The “truth” here means the gospel itself. He applied the verse “If we claim to be without guilt (some translations say sin), we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” to people who had not yet opened their hearts to this gospel truth and who should open to it.

John thus tried to lead people to faith in Jesus. He called them to enter into fellowship with believers, as the following words clearly show: “What we have seen and heard we declare to you, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.” (1 John 1:2-3) However, with these words he only gave a foretaste of the gospel; naturally, John was also obliged to tell these people how it is to happen that they enter into this fellowship with believers. Therefore, he explained to them that we live in sin without God and thus stand in darkness. He pointed out that it is possible to live in the light by coming to God, who is light.

He confirmed that all who belong to God are children of light and that their identity as light is the result of being cleansed from guilt. Immediately after this statement, he said that all who live in the light are cleansed from all sin. One verse later he spoke of the general need for redemption because he was addressing people who had not yet confessed their sins, saying: “If we claim to be without guilt (some translations say sin), we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” With this assertion that denial of sin is self-deception, he was primarily addressing Gnostics.

He wanted to make clear to them that they are in need of redemption from sin and that all people are guilty, as he said in the present tense: “If we claim to be without guilt, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” He told them in the following verses that they can receive forgiveness if they confess their sins repentantly and do not deny that they have sins (1 John 1:9).

Because after a repentant confession of their sins they have the same forgiveness as the children of God (1 John 2:12). After John explained this, he spoke from the perspective of God’s children who have already confessed their sins. He switched from present tense to past tense when he wrote: “If we claim we have not sinned, we make God out to be a liar.” Now he required that the confession of sin be made in the past tense because sinning belongs to the past when we fully turn to Jesus. The new birth, which follows true repentance, makes us children of God who do not sin and therefore keep the commandments. To confirm this, John wrote in 1 John 2 that God’s children do not sin and thereby distinguish themselves from the children of the enemy, who sin and break the law.

However, for many, this truth does not correspond to reality, since obviously converted people still sin. Allegedly (according to common “Christian” belief), Christians therefore live in two natures: their flesh and their new nature. To this, it must be said: Grace kills the old sinful nature, the flesh according to the Bible. It is a denial of the Bible to say

that a Christian keeps his fleshly nature under grace. The thesis that Christians live in two natures under grace is untenable according to the Bible. Thus the question arises why Christians sin, since on the one hand it applies: If the flesh is dead, the sinful nature has no power over us and we normally do not sin. But on the other hand, after a true conversion that kills the flesh, we can be tempted to sin. Despite the killing of the old nature, impulses stored in us from the old nature can be awakened, for example by advertising. We can resist these impulses through grace. But after conversion, we can also give in to these impulses that try to entice us. By doing so, we give room to the flesh and act accordingly sinfully. Many are also unwilling to give up certain sinful urges like smoking even though they are sincerely converted. Thus many Christians do not fully deny themselves or completely give up their old life for Jesus' sake.

Therefore, they often succumb to old urges, such as the urge to smoke, because they give room to their flesh. They relapse because they do not fully walk in the new nature and do not place the new life in Christ above certain habitual sins. It is therefore not surprising at all that Christians sin, because often their faith is weak and so is their Christian lifestyle. Converted people also sin by being tempted to sin, even if through faith they could overcome sin. After all, converted people are not always mature Christians who are strong in self-denial and fully walk in the new nature.

Jesus does not take away our free will after conversion. Therefore, it is not automatic that we walk in the new nature and sin no more. Only if we walk with Jesus and are closely connected to Him can we resist sin. This also requires consciously denying the old life. We must decide daily whether to accept the new life in Jesus instead of the old life. Jesus cannot keep us from sin if we give room to our flesh and thus reject Him. Moreover, the following natural law applies: Our faith overcomes sin if we believe in the redeeming power of grace. If not, then not. And so we sin automatically when our faith is weak. We cannot expect more than what we consider possible in faith. If we do not expect deliverance from sin from Jesus, we will sin. Almost everyone who calls themselves a Christian says that it is not possible to stop sinning under grace. This attitude reveals the weakness of faith in general Christianity. Those who are weak in faith cannot be mature Christians and will always sin. In contrast, a mature Christian will reflect Jesus.

In Ephesians 4:13-15, Paul points out that we should mature into Christians who reflect Jesus in all His fullness. This, according to Paul, means holding fast to the gospel unwaveringly and no longer being disturbed by false teachings. Through inner maturity, we become ready and able to fulfill God's will at all costs (see Colossians 4:12). But no matter how mature our faith is, we can only remain strong in faith through prayer. We should pray that we do not fall into sin and regularly ask for deliverance from conscious and subconscious sin.

We should also be aware that the Bible teaches the following in 1 John 3:4-9:

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. You know that He appeared so that He might take away our sins. And in Him is no sin. No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him. Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. The one who continues to sin is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.”

The conclusion is clear: Grace is not cheap, but precious and powerful grace that kills the sinful nature and makes us live sinless lives. Grace cannot permit sinning because it kills sin.

6.) The Gospel of Cheap Grace Denies the Necessity of Repentance and Turning Away

Followers of cheap grace deny the necessity of repentance or equate the biblical repentance simply with their dead faith conviction. They claim that the repentance associated with the evangelistic message is merely a synonym for their dead faith. Thus, adherents of cheap grace see even the evidently necessary repentance for salvation as included in a dead faith conviction and deny that a visible change of mind after conversion is necessary. But if that were so, why then should we repent in a way that is reflected in works? Why does repentance, according to the Bible, include mourning over committed sins? The answer is quite simple: Because the repentance that belongs to salvation and is necessary for redemption signifies a change of mind that automatically shows itself in one's way of life. This proves that our faith saves by bearing fruit.

After all, mourning over committed sins is a sign of our redeemed heart. That works of repentance and the intention of turning away bear witness to our salvation follows from the fact that the true gospel is built upon our willingness to repent and leads us by grace to repentance. Because the grace that heals from sin is given only to the humble who recognize that they are sick with sin and need healing. Therefore, a call to repentance should be made to sinners before the gospel message is proclaimed. In the call, "Repent and believe the gospel!" (Mark 1:15), the call to repentance precedes the call to faith in the gospel. We see this in all calls to repentance. Examples include: "They should repent and turn to God, performing works worthy of repentance." (Acts 26:20) "Repent and believe the gospel!" (Mark 1:15) "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38 - GN) This means that the call to repentance should first move people's hearts to an inner breaking of self before the proclamation of the gospel.

This breaking of self means acknowledging one's own guilt and lack of righteousness, making the person ready to repent, so they can accept the gospel. Whoever is not ready to repent rebels against God's grace or

despises its riches. Paul said: "Or do you despise the riches of His kindness, patience, and long-suffering? Do you not know that God's kindness leads you to repentance? But because of your stubborn and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Since unrepentance is incompatible with grace, we read the following in Matthew 21:31-32: "Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even after you saw it, you did not repent afterward to believe him.'" Here Jesus told the Pharisees that repentance would have paved their way to saving faith, which, however, was missing. The gospel obviously bounces off an unrepentant heart because saving faith goes together with acknowledging one's own guilt and condemning one's sins.

Grace itself fills us, when we sincerely admit our guilt, with inner true repentance unto salvation, which goes far beyond merely acknowledging guilt and produces fruits of turning away. Only grace brings forth true works of repentance that testify to our turning and salvation, through which we experience salvation. We are saved by grace that works repentance and turning in our lives. The New Testament speaks of "repentance unto salvation." The repentance of the Corinthians, which led to a holy life, is an example of true repentance unto salvation. According to Paul, it saved the Corinthians because it led to true turning away; see the following Bible words: "... the godly sorrow produced repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow produces death. Consider what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done." (2 Corinthians 7:9-10)

Acts 11:18 also shows the connection between the salvation of faith and repentance: "Then God also granted repentance to the Gentiles so that they might live." Other Bible passages emphasize this connection, see James 4:8-10: "Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up." Here it is clear that repentance should take place and be connected with a surrender to God. This means that our repentance must come from the heart. Any purely external repentance ritual, such as tearing garments, is useless without remorse.

Therefore, God said in Joel 2:12-13: "Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing." Already in Jeremiah 3:10, God condemned people who only outwardly return to Him: "And though they say, 'As the Lord lives,' surely they swear falsely." God said in the next chapter that His wrath would fall on Judah and Jerusalem

if they did not circumcise their hearts, i.e., truly repent inwardly. Jeremiah 4:4-5 says: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my wrath go out like fire and burn with none to quench it, because of your evil deeds." Similarly, Jeremiah 4:14: "Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you may be saved." Repentance is authentic only if we change our lifestyle not only outwardly but from the inside. Therefore, Acts 3:19 calls: "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out." Fruit worthy of repentance should prove that we have changed inwardly: "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." (Luke 3:8) Repentance and visible turning form a unity in Scripture because true repentance brings fruits in our lives by a lifestyle worthy of repentance. The saving repentance is compared by John the Baptist to a healthy tree that bears good fruit. Without fruit worthy of repentance, our repentance is not genuine because we are obviously still sick with sin.

Just as a sick tree cannot bear good fruit, so we cannot produce good fruit or true works of repentance if we are sick with sin. And only when we do true repentance that comes from a cleansed heart and produces good fruit can we be forgiven. This is evident when the people ask John: "What then should we do to be saved?" His answer is: "Whoever has two tunics must share with him who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise." (Luke 3:10-11) For John, fruit worthy of repentance includes tangible acts. The fruit of true repentance, necessary for the forgiveness of our guilt, shows in love for neighbor, obedience to the law, and contentment. (Luke 3:11-14) Not only John but also Paul spoke about repentance that is visible in works and bears witness to our turning: "I preached first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing deeds in keeping with their repentance." (Acts 26:20) Elsewhere about turning: "And through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:39) Jeremiah 30:15 similarly says: "For thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel: 'In repentance and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.'" Also: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:7-8) The Bible connects repentance and turning with the entire gospel message, see the following verses: "It is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." (Luke 24) Also, in Mark 6:12-13, the commission to evangelize is combined with the call to repentance and turning. Jesus also said that we should repent: "From that time Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (Matt 4:17) "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (Mark 1:4 - GN) Therefore, the disciples did not preach a cheap grace message but pointed to the necessity of repentance, see Matt 3:2: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Whoever does not repent should consider the following Bible passages, see Luke 13: "Jesus said to

them, 'Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'" Revelation 2:21-22 warns of consequences for those who do not repent of their sins.

John the Baptist sternly warns the crowd: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Faith and obedience form a contrast according to the gospel of cheap grace

To understand that faith and obedience are connected, it is important to understand the concept of saving faith. Romans 10 says: "For if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth confession is made and salvation is brought." According to these words, saving faith is anchored in the heart. Saving faith therefore means more than a dead religious conviction; it works on the heart, influences our heart, and thus our inner attitude. That is why James 1:27 says: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." Many wrongly think that saving faith in Jesus is purely a mental matter and does not necessarily change our heart.

The reason for this is that in today's common language the word "faith" does not correspond to what Scripture means by faith. According to popular usage, faith means no more than an intellectual conviction of a certain matter. Faith in God thus means merely being in the assumption that God exists. Faith in Jesus would therefore mean assuming that he is real and that his work of salvation is real too. But faith in Jesus in the biblical sense is not only to hold his existence and his redemptive work to be true.

Biblical faith in Jesus means much more. The biblical faith in the original language of the Bible means a conviction to which we cling. By accepting the new life in Jesus instead of our own life, we cling to Jesus, and only then are we truly "believers" in the biblical sense.

Therefore, biblical faith in Jesus includes an inner connection with his person as well as true steadfastness for his sake. Accordingly, Paul exhorted under great distress to remain faithful to Jesus in order not to throw away the confidence of the gospel, on which, according to Paul, immeasurable reward depends.

In Hebrews 10:34 and following verses we read: "For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised."

The hallmark of true saving faith is precisely that we, by a life decision

for Jesus, fix our lives in him, live under his lordship, obey him, and also dedicate ourselves to him. Thus we differ from demons who also believe in the person of Jesus and His perfect work of salvation without the slightest doubt and yet are not saved, because their faith does not lead to obedience to God. Jesus, however, said that we obey when we believe (see John 6:28-29). The whole Bible therefore shows that obedience is to be expected from true believers. Accordingly, there are many admonitions to obedience in the New Testament. In Romans 12:11, believers are urged by Paul to serve God with a fervent heart, because faith and obedience evidently belong together.

Conversely, Paul linked unbelief with disobedience. In the letter to the Colossians, he called unbelievers “sons of disobedience.” He said that God's wrath comes upon the sons of disobedience and that the works of the sons of disobedience are also worthy of condemnation. These works include fornication, greed, idolatry, impurity, or fleshly passion. Paul pointed out to the Colossians that before their conversion they committed these shameful deeds, and thus were counted among the sons of disobedience.

We learn that by the power of faith and inner renewal they have turned away from their disobedience and no longer count as sons of disobedience. The liberation of the church to obedience thus saved them from the wrath of God and led to their salvation.

Paul mentioned this to emphasize that disobedient people cannot please God. After all, he could have said that the wrath of God will come upon all unbelievers. But he emphasized that God's wrath comes upon the disobedient. Thus he wanted to reveal the connection between disobedience and unbelief and the connection between obedience and faith and salvation. A similar passage concerns the change of mind of the Ephesians.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians that they had become obedient through faith and pointed out that this obedience is a sign of conversion and salvation. He wrote that everyone who does not want to obey God is dependent on an evil spiritual power and therefore does not live under Christ's lordship or grace. Paul also urged a believing church to be perfected in obedience and spoke of punishing the disobedience of another church.

If saving faith made obedience unnecessary and gave salvation in rebellion, all these Bible passages would make no sense, and there would be no commands to follow. On the contrary, Jesus said that his word in the Sermon on the Mount is binding. He compared the word of the Sermon on the Mount to a rock on which all the redeemed stand, while all who stumble over Jesus are those who are offended by his word. Peter spoke of those who stumble over Jesus as the precious cornerstone of the spiritual temple.

According to Peter, these are those who “stumble at the word, being disobedient” (1 Peter 2:8). From this we can conclude that all the redeemed, who represent the spiritual temple of God, acknowledge Jesus' word, while all others stumble at his word and are thus disobedient toward Jesus.

We also see the connection between faith and obedience in that Paul said in Romans 15:15 it is a grace to be a servant of Jesus. In verse 18 he referred to bringing Gentiles to obedience through the gospel. Moreover, the gospel message is connected with a call to obedience.

Therefore, only those receive the Holy Spirit who obey God (see Acts 5:32): "And we are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Faith, obedience, and righteousness are thus clearly related. This connection is also evident in Abraham. Abraham was justified by faith according to Scripture (see Galatians), and this faith produced obedience. Paul wrote: "By faith Abraham obeyed" (see Hebrews). Then Paul listed examples of his obedience that distinguished his faith righteousness. Abraham was obedient when he was commanded to be circumcised (Genesis 17:9). Because of faith, Abraham obeyed the call to move to a land he was to inherit. Abraham went out, not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8).

Such faith righteousness, which shows itself in obedience to God, is according to Paul a sign of salvation, because Romans 4:11 says that we are children of Abraham if we walk in the footsteps of Abraham's faith.

And as children of Abraham, we have the blessing promise that God gave Abraham because of his obedience (see Genesis 22:18): "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." Paul referred to this promise in Galatians 3: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 22, that through his seed all peoples will be blessed, is to be fulfilled through Jesus, who is a descendant of Abraham and applies only to those who follow Abraham's example of obedience.

Thus, all the redeemed are characterized by obedience of faith after the example of Abraham, "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14).

The Scripture thus points to Abraham not only as the father of faith but also as an example of God-pleasing obedience from faith, because according to Scripture obedience and faith belong together.

The conclusion: faith without obedience is not true faith that brings blessings, because true faith enters the heart, leads to a relationship with God and inner connection with God, which results in faithfulness. Faith in God blesses only when it goes hand in hand with obedience and is shown in deeds.

God has always given instructions to believing people and worked miracles when people obeyed these instructions by faith. But God never worked miracles or rewarded people if they did not do what they said. And any disobedience is condemned in the Bible, because all disobedience is sin and separates from God. Sin, in turn, is the result of a missing relationship with God and an unbelieving heart turned away from God, whereas in a faith relationship we always want to obey God. For this reason we can say: Whoever truly obeys Jesus is truly believing—or conversely, a true believer is also obedient toward Jesus.

Therefore, the Bible repeatedly connects the terms faith and obedience. It is written: Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; but whoever does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him (John 3:15; John 3:18; Romans 1:18; 1 John 5:12).

Here the word “faith” is later replaced by the expression “obedience” to show that obedience and faith are one.

And obedience certainly does not mean, as followers of cheap grace want us to believe, merely mentally believing in the gospel, especially since this is not living and saving faith in the biblical sense.

According to the Bible, obedience means listening to Jesus, wanting to listen to him, accepting him and his word, and wholeheartedly following it. This obedience characterizes all who truly belong to Jesus because they believe in his costly grace.

8. The True Gospel Aims at Sanctification Adherents of a cheap grace separate salvation by faith—or justification—from biblical sanctification, in order to dismiss the process of sanctification as superfluous. Yet the Bible clearly teaches: Salvation by faith and sanctification as the fruit of faith go hand in hand, which is why we demonstrate our salvation by living a holy life. An unholy lifestyle indicates that we are not saved, for salvation produces sanctification.

Now, one might object that even evidently saved Christians like Paul pursued sanctification. Perhaps he sought sanctification only to sacrifice his life as a missionary after already being saved—being saved solely through his faith. So is sanctification merely the result and not the cause of salvation, such that sanctification can be entirely separated from saving faith? Does sanctification then occur independently of salvation? The biblical answer is: No. In fact, the example of the Apostle Paul—who gave everything for sanctification by faith—proves the opposite. His example shows how seriously Paul took God’s demand for sanctification, because he viewed his righteousness by faith as dependent on sanctification. He said he wanted to complete his sanctification in order to reach his goal of faith: to be conformed to Christ, following Him on the narrow path. He also called persecuted Christians to imitate him, in order to prove themselves in faith and receive a reward in the Kingdom of Heaven. Thus, Paul did not separate sanctification from his saving faith and righteousness by faith. He did not view sanctification as an optional add-on for true believers. Rather, he saw a direct connection between holiness and righteousness by faith. Holiness, to him, was a mark of all true believers, because true faith sanctifies and thereby gives us a righteous standing before God. We must therefore understand that our righteousness before God depends on the measure of our sanctification, and through increasing sanctification our righteousness also increases. A growing sanctification means growing righteousness by faith and an increasing faith.

Paul valued a righteousness matured into full sanctification. That’s why—even after a genuine conversion—he made every effort to perfect his holy way of life through the power of grace. He did not use his saved state as an excuse to escape the holy demands of the Sermon on the Mount. He knew he was saved in order to live a holy life. That we, as honestly converted Christians, should increasingly strive for sanctification following the example of Paul, proves the necessity of sanctification. Precisely because our salvation occurs through

sanctification and is connected to it, it must always be our goal in faith to be holy, to remain holy, and to prove ourselves as God's saints. And of course, a truly saved Christian may still grow in faith and advance in sanctification. However, it is not possible to be saved and enter the Kingdom of God without sanctification. For this reason, we need the grace that saves us through the sanctification of the Spirit to stand before God. As Scripture says: "But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, ESV) As this passage shows, grace aims at sanctification, so that we can fulfill God's command: "Be holy, for I am holy."

Sanctification by grace means putting off our sinful nature and instead putting on the righteousness of Jesus. That is the true purpose of grace, for we are called to reflect Christ, who in his nature fully embodies God's holiness. Accordingly, we are called to walk in godliness, as Christ himself did, who is to take shape within us. God will not settle for less, because He cannot deny His holy standards. He cannot overlook sin or tolerate it in His holy presence. To be in relationship with God, sanctification is therefore necessary. For as it says in Habakkuk, God's eyes are too pure to look upon sin. He can have no fellowship with a sinner, because there is an unbridgeable gap between His holiness and the sinfulness of the sinner, whose nature is opposed to God. A sinner cannot draw near to God, because his nature is in rebellion against Him. Thus, we cannot be redeemed from our alienation from God without sanctification. Without sanctification, we are unworthy to have fellowship with a holy God. Without sanctification, we remain estranged sinners, lacking the glory of God, which radiates from His holiness. Without sanctification, we miss the very purpose of the Christian life: to reflect Christ, who is the image of God. Therefore, we are called to pursue the goal of sanctification, for without sanctification, we will never, as Paul says, see God. This too proves that we must never separate salvation from sanctification. The two words—salvation and sanctification—belong together. In fact, they are etymologically related. The word "Savior" (German: Heiland) is derived from these very concepts. Jesus unites both terms in himself, calling himself our Savior, because he gives us both: salvation and sanctification. Or better yet, he gives us salvation through sanctification. Therefore, we cannot claim Christ's saving work for ourselves if we reject sanctification. We are only justified when we embrace his saving work for both our redemption from sin and our sanctification. This happens when we sincerely accept the righteousness of Jesus and find new life in Christ. We must understand: Justification by faith and sanctification belong together. God's grace brings us into right relationship with Him by giving us both the atonement of Christ as reparation for our guilt and sanctification. Paul expressed this in 1 Corinthians 1:30: "Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption." We must understand this: There is no justification before God while remaining in sin, even though salvation and redemption are given to a sinner by grace. The sinner indeed receives grace while in sin, but at the moment of conversion, he experiences cleansing for deliverance from sin and an inward renewal for sanctification. Only through this can God declare us righteous. After all, God, in His holiness, cannot simply declare a sinner righteous out of mercy alone. Being holy, He can make no compromises with sin. Thus, no unholy sinners

can stand before Him or be deemed worthy of Him—not even those who profess Christianity or go to church.

According to Scripture, Jesus will choose from among all professing Christians only those who are without blemish and reflect His holiness on the Day of Judgment and His return. These are the so-called elect, found worthy to enter the heavenly Jerusalem. The bride of Christ—the true Church of Jesus—is to be without spot or wrinkle, worthy of Christ. Of the many who count themselves as Christians, Jesus says He will choose only a few. The Bible tells us that many wrongly assume they are chosen. They hope for a cheap grace that leads to justification despite an unholy life. In doing so, they ignore God's command to be sanctified—and thus they can never be reconciled to God. For whoever rejects sanctification rejects the grace of God. In 1 Thessalonians 4 we read: “For God did not call us to impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.” Whoever resists sanctification, resists God Himself and remains in self-chosen separation from Him. In such distance from God, it is neither possible to enter into relationship with Him nor to have peace with Him. As Scripture says: “There is no peace for the wicked.” (Isaiah 48:22) Therefore, God cannot make peace with us until we are redeemed from sin, sanctified, and thereby made righteous through grace. As Romans 5:1 puts it: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Thus, we are only reconciled with God to our eternal salvation when, through grace, we willingly turn away from sin and allow ourselves to be sanctified. Paul expressed it this way: “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.” (Romans 6:22) Our eternal life in paradise therefore depends on our sanctification, which is the fruit of our redemption from sin. Eternal life is not something we can seize by downplaying our sins...

9. According to Scripture, the lawless are punished and the obedient are rewarded. In the doctrine of cheap grace, it's the other way around.

According to Paul, Jesus redeems only those who are obedient to Him and sincerely accept and live by His word—such as the Sermon on the Mount. That is why it is written about Jesus:

"And being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Hebrews 5:9).

This should not surprise us, for God promised to establish a King who could never be corrupted by anything or anyone, and to whom the righteous would willingly submit (Isaiah 9:6-7). This King is Jesus, whom the redeemed people joyfully and in holiness serve. This is affirmed in the Song of Zechariah—see Luke 1:68-75.

Already Isaiah said:

"Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David" (Isaiah 55:3).

The New Testament also clearly shows that only those who are obedient to Jesus will experience salvation. James 1:22 states:

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

In Revelation 22:14-15 we read:

"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, and sorcerers, and the sexually immoral, and murderers, and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie."

Jesus further promises that He and the Father will come and dwell with those who keep His word (John 14).

Obedying the commandments out of love also brings true joy (John 15:10-11)—that is, inner peace and the joy of harmony with God (Isaiah 48:17-18).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who teach and keep His commandments. They will be called the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Revelation likewise pronounces a blessing on those **"who keep the commandments of God, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city"** (Revelation 22:14).

In Revelation 14:12-13 we read that only those who remain obedient until death can expect a true reward and belong to God's holy people:

"This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep His commands and remain faithful to Jesus."

Then I heard a voice from heaven say: "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

Other Bible verses confirm that only the obedient are righteous before God:

"If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples" (John 8:31).

Psalm 19:9 says:

"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

"He who rejects the word of God will himself be rejected" (1 Samuel 15:23).

The conclusion is clear: Eternal life depends on obedience.

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not

obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:36).

In God's kingdom, there are no disobedient people—only the obedient. **"Then the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him"** (Daniel 7:27).

That we are redeemed unto obedience through grace is also clearly stated in the New Testament. Jesus said:

"Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Elsewhere Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him, but they will not follow a stranger's voice.

Therefore, we must take seriously the words of John 3:36:

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."

Our salvation and election cannot be separated from obedience—see 1 Peter 1:2:

"You were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with His blood."

What are the consequences of disobedience?

John wrote:

"Whoever practices righteousness is of God, but whoever commits sin is of the devil. Sin is the transgression of the law."

He made it clear that disobedience to the commandments—i.e., sin—is not a freedom or right, but marks us as enemies of God.

Disobedience also brings shame upon us. Paul said that those who disobey the word of God should be ashamed—see 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

According to Paul, disgrace and wrath come upon all who disobey God:

"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming upon the disobedient" (Colossians 3:2-6).

Disobedience is an abomination to God:

"They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They

are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good"
(Titus 1:16).

God's vengeance, wrath, and punishment come as a result of disobedience:

"I will take vengeance in anger and wrath upon the nations that have not obeyed Me" (Micah 5:14).

God cannot forgive us if we remain disobedient. This is shown in Lamentations 3:42:

"We have transgressed and rebelled, and You have not forgiven."

Just as the Israelites, because of their disobedience and grumbling against God, were not allowed to enter the Promised Land, so too is the kingdom of God closed to the disobedient.

In Hebrews 3:11, Paul warned that we could fall just as the Israelites did:

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But encourage one another daily, while it is called 'Today', lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. As it is said: 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was God angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would never enter His rest, if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:12-19).

This passage also shows that, for Paul, unbelief and disobedience are one and the same. Unbelief leads to the hardening of the heart and to disobedience. Through this inner rebellion, as the passage makes clear, we forfeit our salvation.

10. According to the Gospel of Cheap Grace, Jesus is Not Precious Enough to Be Worth Dedication

Adherents of cheap grace say that God's grace is a gift that must not cost the recipient anything. They say: Grace is paid for by God and we must not pay an extra charge through our own contribution to grace. A gift is, after all, completely free for the recipient and thus "cheap" for the recipient. That is why they say that a dedication to Jesus, which leads to discipleship, is not desired by God. After all, they claim that in this way

we would be adding our own effort and thus our own contribution to the gift of faith of grace. However, loving Jesus and following Him out of dedication by no means implies "paying extra" on the gift of grace. Quite the contrary. Whoever dedicates themselves to Jesus has surrendered their life to Him and follows Him because, out of love for Him, they cannot do otherwise.

Such discipleship does not serve to pay for grace or to earn it proportionally. Whoever follows Jesus is freed by the paid grace to imitate the way of Christ. Such discipleship happens solely out of faithfulness to Jesus as a result of faith-obedience. A true and earnest discipleship of the person of Jesus thus occurs exclusively as a response to His grace, which bestows a love relationship with Him. Discipleship means nothing other than stepping into the footsteps of Jesus as a result of an inner relationship with Him and testifies to our new existence in Him, from which our salvation follows. It presupposes that we give up our lives for Jesus. And Jesus should be worth that to us, otherwise we are not worthy of Him. Jesus Himself says this. He said: Whoever places father or mother or sister or their own life above me is not worthy of me. And in this context, He called us to deny ourselves for His sake, because the gift of grace consists of accepting Jesus' life in place of our own life, so that we may follow Him. Discipleship of Jesus thus results from every earnest conversion and by no means signifies works-righteousness. Rather, it shows that a person is under grace and has accepted Jesus. For only someone who truly lives connected with Him can follow Jesus and it requires the surrender of one's own life to gain a new life in Jesus. Thus, discipleship of Christ cannot be reprehensible, for it means accepting and living out the new life in Jesus. Discipleship also shows that we stand by Jesus and love Him, and this love shows our appreciation for Him and His grace. We are clearly indebted to Him for this.

Scripture says: A genuine dedication to Jesus combined with discipleship is, at the purchase price of grace, the only appropriate response to God's grace. Dedication to Jesus gives us grace itself, which is why it is a fruit of a true conversion. True Christians who follow Jesus therefore dedicate themselves to Jesus because God's grace changes their heart. Jesus Himself dwells in their hearts, so that they are gripped by His love and earnestly strive to imitate Jesus with heartfelt dedication. God expects this fervent love from us, because otherwise we are obviously not real Christians and will be judged. John therefore warned a church that without repentance and turning away they would be judged, because they had given up their first love. This first love is the love for Jesus. Thus, passion for Jesus is required by the Bible, which is founded on an appreciation for His person. Without a true appreciation for Jesus, we will miss grace, because it is never squandered. Conversely: An appreciation of Jesus (which is expressed both in a dedication to Him and in discipleship) is absolutely necessary for our salvation. To illustrate this fact, there are countless Bible verses that prove how precious Jesus should be to us. We read in Scripture of a knowledgeable businessman who possessed many precious pearls and suddenly saw a pearl that was more valuable than all other pearls combined. He recognized that all his

pearls that he possessed were laughably worthless compared to the one true precious pearl, which apparently overshadows all the wealth of a great businessman. The merchant sold all his possessions because of his appreciation for this special pearl. This symbolizes the richness of grace. This parable explains, according to Jesus' words, what the Kingdom of God is like. It wants to tell us that God's grace in the person of Jesus has more wealth to offer than all the riches of the world combined, which are in truth only useless toys compared to the wealth in Jesus. Jesus, in this parable, symbolizes the precious pearl, and the merchant represents someone who knows how to appreciate this pearl, completely dedicates himself to it, and therefore also has a place in the Kingdom of God.

The Gospel therefore does not address those who fail to recognize Jesus as the precious pearl of the Gospel. According to Jesus, it is even a waste of time to talk about Him and His Gospel with people who do not appreciate Him as a precious pearl. We should not even engage with people who intend to trample on the pearl of the Gospel, which is Jesus. It was not for nothing that Jesus told His disciples to move on if people did not want to know anything about Him and His precious grace. He admonished them not to throw pearls before swine. Swine do not recognize the value of precious pearls and do not care about precious pearls, but trample on them. Jesus picked up this image when He said that precious pearls (which He compared to the Gospel) should not be thrown before swine.

Whoever, unlike swine, knows how to appreciate a pearl and has recognized its value, will not trample on it. Rather, he guards it as a treasure like the merchant in the parable. After all, one holds fast to a pearl that one considers precious, and thus true disciples hold fast to the person of Jesus as the precious pearl of the Gospel in faith. They guard the pearl of the Gospel, which is Jesus, as a heavenly treasure. True disciples consider their material possessions laughable compared to the pearl of the Gospel, which is Jesus. And precisely this attitude Jesus demanded in the Sermon on the Mount when He told us, in essence: We should not collect earthly treasures, but only accumulate spiritual wealth that comes from Him.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Jesus called on the rich young ruler to sell his possessions and give to the poor. Thus, our dedication to Jesus should be complete; we should see Him as a treasure for whom we gladly give up everything else. After all, according to the parable, the merchant could only obtain the pearl, which stands for Jesus, by giving up all his possessions for this pearl. Sacrifices made out of dedication to Jesus are therefore meant to express our appreciation for Him.

This refers not only to material sacrifices. Jesus demanded more from His disciples. He demanded dedication to Him even unto death. He called it betrayal that Peter denied knowing Him, even though this was life-threatening for Peter. Peter received forgiveness, for he repented of his betrayal. Grace ultimately led him to die as a martyr for Jesus and to live radically for Jesus. So Peter was not granted cheap grace. He was

justified because he also came to realize that grace is costly. So we can conclude: God's grace is given to us as a gift of faith, but only if we recognize Jesus as a costly treasure and thus dedicate ourselves to Him. A dedication to Jesus shows that we value the gift of grace. If adherents of cheap grace are unwilling to dedicate themselves to Jesus, they misrecognize His value and are not like the merchant in the parable.

According to the Bible, they belong to the people Jesus compared to swine, who misrecognize and want to trample on Him as a precious pearl. They belong to those who are not even worthy of being evangelized. For they do not want to hear the true Gospel and despise grace, even if they honor Jesus with their lips. Their lip confessions merely make them hypocrites. And so they do not truly accept the gift of grace because inwardly they do not want the true gift, which is Jesus Himself. They are like a person who accepts a gifted pearl to gain the favor of the giver, but then disposes of the pearl at the next garbage dump. They think that God's grace cannot be worth anything because it is offered to us as a gift of faith. But the Bible says that grace is a jewel. And a jewel is valuable, even as a gift. A jewel can be paid for out of one's own pocket or presented as a gift. Ultimately, the value of the jewel is independent of who pays for it.

However, the question arises: Who can pay for it? According to the Bible, man is unable to make a sacrifice for his sins to buy himself free from guilt. Therefore, God sent Jesus to atone for our guilt and redeem us from our sin. Grace was purchased by God because the purchase price was so high that only God or the divine person of Jesus could pay it. Scripture also tells us that all that is precious can only come from God. James said that every perfect gift comes from God and can be nothing but a gift of God. That grace is a gift of God thus does not minimize the value of grace, but rather confirms the words of the Bible: "All that is precious comes from God and is a gift of God. Only with God is wealth to be found." Therefore, the treasure of heaven can also only be a gift of God, which we have in Jesus. And since God is perfect, His gift of grace speaks of His divine sublimity and greatness and goodness. And therefore we should not simply take this gift for granted and act as if it were worthless junk, but accept it with reverence and guard it as a treasure.

10. The Gospel of Cheap Grace Does Not Have Jesus as its Point of Reference and Standard, and Denies Biblical Concepts

Scripture says that Jesus is the **standard for the only true righteousness** valid before God. Thus, our righteousness is measured by the Word of God, because Jesus is the living realization of the Word of God. So it can be said that any gospel that deviates from the Word of God, and thus from Jesus, and adapts to human standards, is not the true Gospel and leads to a complete secularization of Christianity. This is the case with the gospel of cheap grace, for this gospel states that grace

would aim at a lawless life. But of Jesus it is said that he "loved righteousness and hated lawlessness" (see Hebrews 1:9).

And so it is impossible to align one's life with Jesus while living lawlessly. Moreover, we are naturally not true Christians if we reject Jesus' disposition and deny him in our lifestyle with a lawless attitude. The gospel of cheap grace is therefore not at all focused on Jesus. Rather, it leads away from Jesus and seduces believers into apostasy by inciting a willful and lawless lifestyle. Ultimately, the gospel of cheap grace only formally invokes the Jesus of the Bible. In truth, it invokes a Jesus who is a figment of the imagination of people who do not like the true Jesus of the Bible.

The gospel of cheap grace teaches us a message of salvation that is adapted to this human-invented Jesus. Concepts like righteousness, sin, or holiness are completely twisted by the gospel of cheap grace for this purpose. The result of this is that the adherents of this gospel have a distorted worldview, in which they cannot distinguish righteousness from unrighteousness and sin. Thus, they cannot do anything with concepts like holiness or righteousness. For according to the gospel of cheap grace, all these concepts completely lack a biblical foundation. According to the gospel of cheap grace, every sinner attains the status of a righteous person if he has formally accepted Jesus, without demonstrating this righteousness in deeds. The Bible, however, tells us that the inner man, to whom Jesus renews us and creates us in true holiness, also manifests itself in a law-abiding lifestyle. After all, God's instructions or commandments describe to us what is righteous, holy, and good in God's eyes. Adherents of the gospel of cheap grace do not recognize this. For, according to the cheap grace doctrine, they reject the moral instructions of the Word of God, which include those of the Sermon on the Mount. Their moral standpoint thus contradicts God's idea of righteousness, and so they do not agree with God and do not have a righteous standing before God. Yet they like to say about themselves that they are righteous, holy, and disciples of Jesus. After all, the Bible says that we may not see God without holiness, that righteousness before God is essential for salvation, and that we should be true disciples of Jesus who meet these criteria. Adherents of cheap grace thus know what God's Word demands of them and may know all the criteria of Scripture that are significant for a righteous standing before God. And yet they are not aware that they lack righteousness because they reinterpret the biblical terms of the Bible. Thus, they consider it a theological fact that they are supposedly justified by faith and supposedly have a righteous standing before God. They consider themselves righteous because they separate the imputed righteousness from grace (which they have "in Christ") from the outward lifestyle or, one might say, from the true reality of life.

They believe that they are righteous and holy by position (i.e., in God's eyes), regardless of their lifestyle. They separate saving faith in Jesus from a holy lifestyle that reflects Jesus. By this, they mean that their righteousness before God would consist of a Christian facade - nothing more. However, the mere fact that Christ should be recognizable in us

speaks against this and shows that our righteousness as Christians has a point of reference, namely Christ himself. In addition, Jesus repeatedly called for us to find new life in him and to enter into discipleship to gain our spiritual and eternal life. And Jesus never commanded anything that we could not implement by the power of his grace and declared all his commandments binding. The instruction to follow him is therefore a clear instruction that we should obey. Thus, we should walk like Jesus. For in the word "Nachfolgen" (follow) is the word "folgen" (follow), because we should follow Jesus' righteous way. This naturally includes actions. Jesus' righteousness, after all, did not consist of empty lip service, but of active mercy. A Christian lifestyle or true discipleship of Jesus therefore never remains theoretical, and accordingly, the Christian is called to practically bear witness to his righteousness in action, according to the example of Jesus. After all, we are to live a holy life, and this includes deeds.

Scripture therefore demands **sanctification** from us, which is concretized in deeds. James wrote, for example: "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show it by his good conduct, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness." James did not separate inner righteousness from outer action.

We can infer this from this verse: "Who among you is wise and understanding? Then let him show that he is indeed that, by leading an exemplary life and doing things that bear witness to wisdom and humility." According to James, righteousness, according to this quote, consists in actively making peace, shedding one's selfishness, and accordingly, leading an exemplary life. Conversely, James said: If we are selfish, we reject Jesus as the wisdom and truth of God, and our inner attitude is unrighteous, even permeated by "demonic" "wisdom." So we can see from James alone: Righteousness before God is not vague or a theoretical matter without practical implications. Righteousness before God does not result from a privileged position that we could gain based on a Christian facade. Our righteous standing before God depends on clearly defined character traits that speak of Jesus' nature, which include love and selflessness.

In contrast, adherents of cheap grace believe that they can deny Jesus with their inner selfish attitude if they outwardly confess him and "stand by him" and yet still be justified. But before God, only truthfulness counts. Our Christian confessions to Jesus are only truthful if we want to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, and we are called to do so. In 1 Peter 1:14-17 we read: "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.' Since you

call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear." According to this Bible passage, it is absolutely impossible for us to be righteous before God if we are not oriented towards Jesus and his divine standard.

Peter finally wrote that we should be holy like God and thus perfection should be our goal. He pointed out that we will be judged by our actions, whether we conform to this commanded perfection. Jesus also said this in essence. He said that those who hear and do the word of the Sermon on the Mount are true disciples and that we should act perfectly mercifully. True disciples are therefore only those who want to comply with Jesus' demand for perfect righteousness, which is also evident in action. So we should understand: True believers measure their righteousness 100 percent by Jesus and therefore see their righteousness dependent on nothing other than Christ himself. That is why they align themselves 100 percent with his word and accept it as the perfect truth of God. And this inner affirmative attitude towards the Word of God does not remain theoretical, but manifests itself practically in a Christian lifestyle, which is why we should identify ourselves as Christians through a holy lifestyle. Our Christianity must therefore never remain at an admiration of the person of Jesus from a distance, because we are to reflect him in our lifestyle. So being a Christian by no means means having read the Bible, simply believing in Jesus mentally, finding him good, and leaving it at that. Being a Christian means identifying with Jesus and his word. This follows from the grace doctrine of the Bible.

According to the Bible, we live under grace in Christ because we have accepted a new being in him and have given up our self-willed life for him. Thus, his righteousness dwells in true Christians and his word is given into their inner being, as long as they remain in him. Jesus said this: "If you remain in me, and my words remain in you" (see John 15:7). If God's word is internalized in our hearts, this in turn means that Jesus lives in us and we are true Christians or disciples in whom Jesus has taken shape. We can thus draw conclusions about whether we are true disciples living in Christ by asking ourselves: Do my heart and my actions agree with his word? Jesus said to confirm this truth: "If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31).

By this Jesus meant that his disciples agree with him in their way of life and thought, because he dwells in them and his word is given into their inner being, and they walk and remain in it. Thus, Jesus expects his disciples to inwardly correspond to the Word of God, like the Sermon on the Mount, and to act accordingly. Conversely, one can say: If we are not willing to meet the demands of the Sermon on the Mount, we do not belong to Jesus, are alienated from him and his word, and will be rejected on the Day of Judgment. To all who call themselves disciples of Jesus without following Christ, Jesus will one day say: Depart from me, I do not know you.

Adherents of cheap grace therefore pretend that they have a righteous standing before God "in Christ" and are not obliged to imitate Jesus' way

of life. They cannot be justified "in Christ," for they do not live in Christ, which is why their heart is completely untouched by his word. Thus, they automatically fail to meet Jesus' demand for discipleship. They cannot become disciples of Jesus without a complete change of mind, because they have no open ear for Jesus' teaching. After all, the basic prerequisite for discipleship is an open ear for Jesus' words. This is already derived from the term "disciple." The term "disciple" means student, and a student wants to learn from his master and therefore listens to him. At the time of Jesus, students followed a rabbi by studying every word of his teaching and memorizing it in detail and living exactly according to it or imitating their rabbi in detail. So we should learn Jesus' words, accept them by faith, and receive them in our hearts through grace, so that we "burn" them into our consciousness to apply them in faith-obedience. Through this we become disciples of Jesus. And a disciple of Jesus is thus someone who is willing to learn from Jesus Christ, to serve him, and to follow him. And as disciples of Jesus, we are also entrusted with a mission. Our mission as disciples is to make others disciples by teaching everything Jesus said. This can also be paraphrased as evangelizing. According to Jesus' instruction, evangelizing means passing on every word of his teaching and urging people to learn his teaching and to explore it completely. After all, we explore the person of Jesus and his wisdom by delving into his word. And thus, when evangelizing, we should explain to people who Jesus is and what his teaching entails, so that they learn to understand the meaning of grace and the Gospel. Therefore, we are only evangelized after we know and have accepted the entire teaching of Christ for ourselves, in order to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and to be his disciples.

Since adherents of cheap grace do not take God's word seriously, they are, contrary to their own opinion, neither evangelized nor disciples of Jesus, for they have not accepted the true Gospel. Of course, they also cannot follow the missionary command to make others disciples. After all, they deny Jesus' teaching and can at most convey a distorted image of Christ's teaching. Because of their desire for cheap grace, they are closed to the true message of the Gospel and the true concept of grace. Accordingly, they do not even recognize that they are called to discipleship in the biblical sense, since they do not take Jesus and his word seriously. So they live so far from Jesus that they only look at him from an extreme distance. From this distance, they can never get to know Jesus, especially because they do not want to accept and embrace his word. For this reason, their Christianity is reduced to a mere facade. Adherents of cheap grace thus show not the slightest Christ-likeness, although they wear a Christian garment. They may have a reputation among believers through their pious facade that shines outwardly. However, God does not judge according to a person's Christian reputation, for he shows no partiality. Peter pointed out this truth after admonishing us to be holy like God. Therefore, faith in Jesus brings no righteousness as long as we do not concern ourselves with the truth that the Word of God reveals to us and is livingly realized in Christ, who called himself the life, the way, and the truth.

In summary: Adherents of cheap grace pervert biblical terms like righteousness before God or holiness to apply them to themselves. They deceive themselves by attributing biblical terms to their own attributes because they do not examine what holiness, righteousness, or discipleship mean in the light of the Bible. This shows: If we do not measure ourselves entirely by Jesus, we will become arrogant. In 2 Corinthians chapter 10 verses 12 f. we therefore read: "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise." From this follows: Our standard for righteousness must not depend on our own self-assessment, but should be measured by the Word of God. According to the Word of God, we are obviously called to lead a selfless life that redounds to the glory of God. To implement this calling makes us true disciples and thus true Christians. For our righteousness before God consists in renouncing all selfishness for Christ's sake and following the selfless path of Jesus. As long as we are too selfish to follow Jesus, we will remain unholy, sinful, and unrighteous in our actions. This brings God's wrath upon us.

10. According to the Gospel of Cheap Grace, Only Hypocrites are Redeemed

Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees shows us: **Hypocrisy** is often associated with an outwardly pious and religious behavior. For example, a conceited Pharisee prayed to God in Jesus' parable in Luke 18:9-14. In doing so, he praised himself and condemned a tax collector who repented and truly turned to God. The Pharisee, however, was wrongly convinced of his own righteousness. He merely pretended to himself that he was better than the tax collector. Therefore, according to Jesus, he was **haughty and unrighteous**.

The "Christian" life of the adherents of cheap grace exhibits precisely these character traits of the Pharisee. They also pray to God. They think that by doing so they would already stand well before God. They fail to recognize their sinfulness. They believe they are better than conventional sinners because they are supposedly under grace. Despite their confessions to Jesus, they are not truly God-fearing, for their turning to Jesus is completely **hypocritical**. But they do not admit this.

On the contrary, they claim that they have accepted Jesus and would align themselves with him. This is untrue, however, for otherwise they would consciously turn away from sin to follow Jesus. But they look through the lens of their **self-righteousness**, overlooking their sins and justifying obvious sins. With utter audacity, they present Jesus as a servant of sin, who would supposedly grant them the right to sin. And so they say that Jesus is merciful precisely to sinners, and that he would approve of their sinful behavior. In doing so, they invoke the following

statement of Jesus: "I have come not for the righteous, but for sinners." They twist the meaning of this statement by saying: If we want to be counted among the righteous who adhere to God's guidelines, we forfeit grace. Let us willfully commit sin so that we may receive grace from God. Thus, grace becomes greater the more we sin. But Jesus, with the above statement, did not mean that his grace is only available to stubborn sinners. Jesus said in addition to this verse that he came to lead the sinner to **repentance** (see Luke 5:32): "I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

A parallel passage is Mark 2:17: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." So Jesus meant that he came only for the **repentant sinners**, so that they would turn away from sin. It is also clear that Jesus was not referring to truly righteous people in Luke 5:32, and the term "righteous" in Jesus' statement in Luke 5:32 is to be understood ironically. It refers to supposedly righteous people who are untouched by Jesus, and thus specifically to the **self-righteous**. And so Jesus said in essence in Luke 5:32: "I have come for those who are sinners before their own conscience, to lead them to repentance. I have not come for those who (out of self-righteousness) count themselves among the righteous."

When Jesus said that he did not come for the self-righteous, **two kinds of people are excluded from grace** who reject the Gospel out of their own self-righteousness. These are, firstly, people who do not believe and do not want to recognize their sins, i.e., consciously worldly people who do not call themselves Christians. They often mock faith. They are not interested in what guilt they have incurred with their sins (because they are satisfied with their own righteousness).

Likewise, among the self-righteous are also religious people, so-called **sheep in wolf's clothing**. They pretend to be Christians and at the same time despise Jesus. They outwardly like to appear holy and pious. This group includes the adherents of cheap grace. They are like the self-righteous Pharisee, as they feel righteous, although they have never truly repented. They believe that Jesus would accept them as self-righteous religious people. However, Jesus did not die and rise for the supposedly healthy. According to his own statement, he is a physician and healer for all who want to be healed from their sin-sick soul. So Jesus did not die out of pity for the self-satisfied sinners, so that they might enter the Kingdom of Heaven out of pious hypocrisy without repentance and conversion. A **Christian cloak thus does not justify us before God**, because a cosmetic change does not alter our lack of righteousness.

10. Adherents of Cheap Grace Deny That Faith Without Works Is Dead

Adherents of cheap grace see grace as a kind of hammock in which they should rest from good works. The Bible, in contrast, says that we should

actively do good. Now one might ask: Why then did Paul emphasize that we are justified not by works but by faith?

However, whoever examines the Bible more closely will clearly recognize the following: Paul, like all other apostles, never spoke out against doing good works that come from grace and originate from Christ. He merely warned against basing one's righteousness on one's own human-righteous works instead of on grace and the saving work of Jesus. Thus, he spoke out entirely against doing self-righteous works, which are done for the glorification of one's own human righteousness and in reliance on one's own righteousness. For the striving for deeds for self-glory and for the glorification of one's own righteousness is not compatible with saving faith.

This is based solely on the fact that saving faith, which brings us grace, is built on **humility**, so that we can only obtain grace as humble people. We are only humble if we acknowledge that we can do good works only in dependence on Jesus, because all truly righteous deeds are based on the righteousness of Jesus, and thus self-glory from our human-righteous works is excluded. For truly good works, we cannot pat ourselves on the back, but can only boast in grace, as it actually puts us in the position of doing good works. Good works in the biblical sense are nourished by the power source of grace and made possible by grace. Thus, good works are not the ultimate source of salvation, but the **indispensable fruit or consequence and the effect of salvation**, as they come from the source of grace and grow out of it as fruit. A fruit, after all, does not grow out of itself, but from a source, and is not the beginning, but the product, the consequence, and the direct effect of a fruit-bearing source, which is the origin of the fruit. Thus, it can never have come into being before the source existed. So the good fruit of a tree never grows before the tree is planted, for it is solely the product of the good tree. The tree that brings the fruit into being is the source of the beautiful fruit.

So it is with our good deeds as Christians. They are an **indispensable fruit of salvation** and do not come from our own human strength, for they are brought into being only by grace. They are the fruit of Jesus' righteousness and his grace. And without grace, we lack the divine power source to do good. From this, it is clear that self-salvation from our human-righteous works is excluded, especially since this would contradict the entire Gospel. If we could be justified by works on our own (and thus without grace), we would not be sinners who need grace. But since we are all naturally sinners, as the true Gospel confirms, we are justified before God only by grace, and cannot earn righteousness through our human-righteous works. Paul taught this very emphatically.

And in this sense Paul told the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." This verse obviously refers to the time of the Ephesians' conversion, who at that time first found faith, whereby they obtained grace and were saved. Only after conversion could

the Ephesians do good works through grace. But these were a consequence of conversion and thus did not precede it. The works mentioned in the above verse therefore refer to the time before their conversion and salvation and are not works of faith, but human-righteous works. And if we read this verse quoted above in context, Paul told the Ephesians in essence: You are saved and justified not by your human-righteous works, but by grace, for you were dead in your sins and thus (without grace) unable to do good works. Only grace has freed you from sin and made you alive and saved you. And one verse later Paul told the Ephesians that thanks to this redemption they are called to honor God with good works that he has prepared (by means of his grace). If we now summarize Paul's entire teaching in this section, we can say: That by nature we cannot do anything good due to our human weakness, and therefore should not strive for self-salvation by means of good deeds, does not mean that good works are not required or are superfluous. On the contrary. If we look beyond the confines of the Bible, we recognize that God wants to give us grace precisely so that we can honor him with our works. God can and will therefore not do without good works on our part, and therefore he offers us his grace, from which the fruit of good works grows.

Thanks to grace, we, as redeemed people, sit directly at the fruit-bearing source of grace, which is Jesus himself. And as long as Jesus lives in us (which is always the case if we are truly believers), we therefore naturally bear much fruit (see John 15). Whoever bears no fruit for God, conversely, lives separated from Jesus. Thus, it defies all reason to assume that a dead and fruitless faith would save. For a dead faith that is fearless lacks Christ, who is the living, life-saving, healing, and fruit-bearing grace in person. If we have true faith, however, Jesus lives in us, so that we bear witness to his spiritual fruits or his righteousness in our deeds. Nevertheless, adherents of cheap grace claim that a dead and fruitless faith, which brings no inner change and therefore does not lead to good works, would save. But James vehemently rejected this misconception. He also used a comparison to illustrate how nonsensical the idea is that a dead faith would save.

He compared someone with a dead faith to a person who sees great need, feigns kindness, and at the same time refuses all help. And such a person, who acts compassionately but offers no help, is certainly deceitful in heart and a hypocrite. And James compared this hypocritical attitude to the inner state of the heart of people who have a dead faith. One who pretends righteousness, according to James, is thus like a person who says: I am righteous because I believe in Jesus, even if I cannot show any Christian works. And thus James said that we are nothing but **hypocrites** if we appeal to Christ, pretend to live connected with him, and at the same time have a dead faith. Whoever has a dead faith in Jesus confesses him with lips and denies him in heart and in his entire lifestyle. And therefore James said clearly and distinctly that a dead faith brings not the slightest righteousness, but merely expresses a hypocritical heart.

So we can see from James that through true faith we bear the fruit of good works. Accordingly, we can prove our faith, if it is genuine and thus living, through good deeds, which is why James said to pious hypocrites: "But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds." James said with these words that we have already forfeited our credibility as nominal Christians if the fruit of Jesus' love is not recognizable in our works, and our works are not good.

And it is important to consider this: We cannot define good works according to the worldly view according to the biblical standard. Thus, according to the Sermon on the Mount, performing a reciprocal act of friendship is not a good deed, for such deeds can also be done by sinners, according to Jesus' words. So the required good works of the Bible are never about outward good deeds that even sinners can do. Good deeds in the biblical sense are thus not contrived good deeds, nor half-hearted acts of friendship, or a nice facade adapted to society. The good works that God demands and that testify to true faith are an expression of Jesus' mercy, for only the righteousness of Christ counts before God. Thus, the inner being and not just the outer being counts for God. Unmerciful and outwardly hidden thoughts are therefore already judged by the Bible as sin and evil work. With the term "works," the Bible means our entire way of life, including our inner being.

Therefore, Paul also called the inner sins of the unredeemed nature "works of the flesh." According to Paul, these bar us from the Kingdom of Heaven (see Galatians). And this means: If our heart is carnal, we are already guilty of evil works by our state of heart, even if no one can outwardly accuse us of a sin. Therefore, we can never become righteous before God, can never show him truly good works, and are even necessarily guilty of evil works without a pure heart. Conversely, however, if our heart is pure, we are obviously redeemed from sin through Jesus, justified before God, and stand before him with good works. If we have a pure heart, we are obviously purified by true faith, from which, according to James, we can show good works as proof of our redemption. A pure heart and good deeds thus belong together, for without a pure heart we can do nothing good.

Moreover, God already equates our inner state of heart with outwardly visible works, for our visible actions only reflect what is going on in our heart. Thus, through our actions, we also show our heart (if we do not consciously pretend, whereby we can only pretend to people). The mouth, according to Jesus, speaks exactly what the heart speaks inwardly. Our language and our actions point to our heart and show whether we are touched by Jesus and inwardly pure or not. If we are pure in heart, we automatically demand righteousness out of love for God and our fellow human beings and perform merciful deeds. And precisely in this lies our responsibility according to the Sermon on the Mount, so that we can see our Christian responsibility if we take Jesus' words seriously. Thus, we cannot truthfully say on the day of our judgment that we knew nothing of our Christian responsibility. At least not if we take the Bible seriously.

Nevertheless, adherents of cheap grace believe that the purpose of their "Christian life" is to rest from works in the hammock of faith. They believe that God would even reward their laziness and sluggishness to good works, as they have a completely different understanding of the Gospel than true Christians. From the twisted perspective of an adherent of cheap grace, the following mindset emerges: If faith in Jesus is the way of salvation and works do not lead to salvation, then good works are superfluous, and I may rest in my faith. And thus, I best stay out of all other people's problems, flee from the problems of the world and any responsibility by lying on my sofa and resting in my faith. And thus, I am also not responsible for good deeds. So it is best to keep a full-day spiritual twilight sleep and not consider or even strive for doing good works. I don't want to become works-righteous and want to rely entirely on cheap grace.

This mindset of the adherents of cheap grace leads to closing their hearts to the needs of the world. Thus, adherents of cheap grace overlook the suffering of people so as not to have to see it and accordingly evade the responsibility of providing help. But we cannot escape responsibility for our actions by closing our eyes to our duties or lying in a hammock and sleeping all day. The motto: "Whoever sleeps does not sin, or whoever sleeps cannot do a bad deed that God will condemn," does not work for the following reason: If we lie on the sofa all day out of sluggishness to good works, because the problems of the world supposedly don't concern us, we are highly unmerciful and indifferent to the ills of the world. Thus, we want to evade actively merciful action and commit sins of omission.

It was not for nothing that James said that we commit sin if we can do good and yet show no willingness to help, especially since it is written in James: "Mercy triumphs over judgment." Whoever, as a "Christian," simply lives for himself and is not aware of any responsibility for his actions, is thus carnal in heart and guilty of evil deeds. If we are sluggish to good works, this therefore shows that we are unredeemed from sin. In this sense, Paul admonished: "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). And whoever is sinful and sluggish to good works can never be touched by grace. Grace redeems us from sin and such sluggishness, so that we become eager for good works. In Titus 2:14 it says in this sense: "He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people of his own that would be eager to do what is good." Likewise in Titus 3:8: "This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone."

Grace therefore not only corrects our outward behavior. It does not only keep us in check so that we do not act visibly unrighteously. No, it gives us eagerness to do good and to act mercifully towards people in a Christian sense. And thus it becomes understandable that Jesus on the one hand said: "Without me you can do nothing." And on the other hand, the same Jesus said in essence in the Sermon on the Mount: "If your

mercy does not extend to acts of love for enemies, you deserve no reward and are nothing but miserable sinners in God's eyes." These words show that without good works flowing from Jesus' mercy, we are not righteous before God. God therefore judges us by our works (see: "He is a God who judges each person's work impartially"). 1 Peter 1:17. God justly repays "...who will repay each person according to their deeds: eternal life to those who by patiently doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality; but wrath and anger to those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil" (Rom. 2:6-8). So it says: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." (Eccl 12:13-14) And so we will be judged by God according to Paul, "who will repay each person according to their deeds: to those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger" (Romans 2:6-8). In Jeremiah chapter 17, God said: "I, the Lord, search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve." The actions of all people are recorded in God's books and form the basis of judgment (Revelation 20:12-13). Therefore, in Colossians 3:23-25 we read: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism."

In 1 Corinthians 15:58, it also says: "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." In Romans 2 from verse 6 it says: "who will repay each person according to their deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil." In Galatians 6:9 it says that we can only expect reward from God if we tirelessly do good, as we reap accordingly what we sow. In Matthew 16:27 we read: "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done." In Revelation 22 it says: "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last." In Psalm 62 we read: "And yours, Lord, is unfailing love; you repay everyone according to what they have done." Whoever calls himself a Christian and does not act Christianly, therefore disgraces the name of Christ, for he bears it wrongfully. About such people, John said in the first chapter of Revelation: "I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead." The Bible thus clearly and distinctly says that without good works (which are a fruit of grace) we do not stand well before God and are not justified, because good works and grace are interwoven and good works and grace form a unity, so that true believers are oriented towards good deeds.

The gospel of cheap grace leads to human, merciless works-righteousness.

. The Gospel of Cheap Grace Leads to Human, Unmerciful Works-Righteousness.

Adherents of cheap grace confuse faith-righteousness and good deeds that come from faith with **human works-righteousness**. To equate every good deed and every endeavor to imitate Jesus with works-righteousness is, of course, completely unbiblical. First, it is necessary to clarify what works-righteousness is, in order to even understand what works-righteousness means and what the Bible says about it.

The word "works-righteousness" does not exist in the Bible. Therefore, for a better understanding, I will elaborate on the term "works-righteousness" as it is commonly heard and read everywhere. I will define it as it is generally understood, so that the difference between good works and works-righteousness becomes clear. **Works-righteousness is the righteousness that we have on the basis of our self-righteous deeds and thus does not come from faith.** Works-righteousness always occurs when we do not build on the work of Christ.

And whoever does not trust in the work of Jesus cannot draw from the power of grace, and consequently builds on himself, which means human works-righteousness in practice. Works-righteousness always occurs inevitably when we rely on our own human righteousness. To distinguish between good works and works-righteousness, one can say: **Good works happen through Christ in faith. Works-righteousness happens automatically when our actions are not guided by Jesus; and we live in unbelief.** Adherents of cheap grace are therefore obviously works-righteous. This is based on their unbelief. Adherents of cheap grace essentially portray the work of Christ as powerless and therefore cannot rely on Jesus in their works. Thus, adherents of cheap grace cannot do works of faith that bear witness to Jesus; consequently, they automatically act works-righteously. This means: They reject Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Thus, they build on their righteousness and their flesh. Their works, which they perform from the flesh, cannot justify them, and so they are under the accusation of their sins. And they will receive the reward of their works, which cannot be good. After all, the wages of our human works is the wages of sin. I now want to briefly summarize why the Bible warns against works-righteousness. Whoever is works-righteous does not acknowledge how necessary faith in the work of Jesus is for his conversion. A works-righteous person may believe in Jesus' sacrifice. But he does not accept it for his conversion because he trusts in being justified in sin. Or he believes that Jesus' work never happened.

Be that as it may, works-righteousness is a path to hell for the following reasons: Whoever is works-righteous disregards the merit of Jesus' sacrifice and does not build his righteousness on this work. Thus, he is compelled to earn his salvation by his own efforts in order to become righteous before God. And thus the principle of performance applies to him. So a works-righteous person is dependent on sanctifying himself and redeeming himself from sin in order to become righteous. But he can never achieve this. The works of a works-righteous person are never good before God and can never justify. For they are works of unbelief and proceed from the godless flesh. Furthermore, we can never become righteous if we make our righteousness dependent on our works, for this is self-righteousness and sin, and sin leads to damnation.

Since works-righteousness is always based on unbelief and self-righteousness, it leads to damnation. And at this point it is important to mention: Works-righteousness often appears outwardly humble and pious, as it is often accompanied by feigned humility and godliness. But behind it hides a religious spirit. And this is intent on self-righteousness. It drives people to do works that appear godly and pious. And yet these works happen out of self-righteousness and offend God. The Pharisees in Jesus' time performed many of these works. And certainly there are modern-day Pharisees who like to do works that have a godly appearance. They like to perform outwardly pious deeds like praying. But they do not pray in the spirit of truth, but in their self-righteous and religious spirit. The difference to true prayer warriors is that works-righteous people display their own piety. They want to hide what is in their hearts and believe in their own righteousness. They present a clean slate to the outside world and do many works to put their own righteousness in a good light.

Through this, they hope for prestige and a better standing before God. Works-righteous people with a religious spirit therefore like to pray loudly to attract attention or try to talk God into their favor. And so they often go to church like real Christians and pray a lot with a semblance of humility. Especially in church, they can live out their religiosity and demonstrate their piety. Works-righteousness, however, is not only evident in church, but everywhere. It manifests itself in demonstrative acts that give a righteous appearance.

The Pharisees in Jesus' time were masters at performing such deeds that served their outward righteousness. But all their beautiful-looking works were **hypocritical**, because they did not proceed from Jesus and his Spirit of truth. Therefore, it is fundamentally important to distinguish Pharisaical-religious deeds from truly good works. Truly good works come from a pure heart. And so our works should never be artificial, as is the case with people who are works-righteous and do pious and good-looking works for show. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount shows that offerings made from the motive of showing off are an abomination to God, as is demonstrative prayer to present oneself or to seek God's attention through much babbling. God is not deceived by this. God judges our actions not superficially, but according to our **heart's attitude**.

According to the Gospel of Cheap Grace, there is no definite standard for sin

According to the Bible, all who do not live according to the word of Jesus are judged by His word, and thus God applies His own standard when judging us. Jesus said: "Whoever rejects me and does not accept my words has a judge; the very word I have spoken will judge them at the last day." (John 12:48)* A cheap grace is therefore impossible. Cheap grace would only be possible if God were to waive His moral demands. This, however, contradicts the following passage from James 2:12-13 (HFA): "Speak and act as those who will be judged by the law that gives freedom. Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment for the merciful." This passage from James proves that sin is not arbitrarily judged by God, but according to the law.

The validity of God's law is also confirmed by the words of Jesus in Luke 16:17-18: "It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." Earlier, we read: "Before John the Baptist began preaching, you had only Moses and the Prophets. Since then, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it." (New Evangelistic Translation)

If one reads only the verse stating that the time has come when the good news is preached instead of the Law and the Prophets, one might be misled to conclude that the Law has become invalid. However, the statement immediately following from verse 16 makes it clear that the good news of the Gospel does not abolish the Law. The verse "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for the smallest part of the Law to become invalid" proves that Jesus never intended to abolish even the smallest part of the Law.

Thus, Jesus confirms the validity of the Law even in the time when the good news is being proclaimed. Jesus said the time had come to proclaim the good news in order to emphasize the beginning of the era of grace, because by the power of grace, the law of God is to be fulfilled.

What the Law and the Prophets said is to become reality in Jesus. It follows that the Gospel is to be preached because it serves the Law and the Prophets; therefore, we should not focus on Moses and the Prophets alone, but on Jesus, who fulfills the Law. Jesus says the message of the Gospel is the new way to fulfill the words of the Prophets, because not even the smallest stroke of the Law will disappear, and it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for even the smallest stroke of the Law to disappear.

According to Jesus, this means, for example, that the marriage covenant should be taken more seriously than before, that marriage should not be dissolved lightly, and that a man should not marry a divorced woman. (Certainly, divorce is justified if the spouse destroys the marriage, but one should not divorce lightly or remarry immediately after adultery, because the spouse could repent.)

Mark 10:11 also emphasizes the validity of the prohibition of adultery, because only intact and blessed marriages can produce good family communities founded in love. Jesus wants to make clear that with the beginning of the era of grace, God's commandments are to be taken more seriously than ever, since He came to fulfill them.

Thus, we are to live according to the commandments and will be judged accordingly, whether we are Jews or Gentiles. Paul wrote in Romans 2:13-16: "For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them, on that day when God will judge people's secrets through Jesus Christ."

16. According to the Gospel of cheap grace, Jesus is not Lord, but merely a free pass to heaven to live for oneself

The Bible emphasizes how important it is to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and refers in countless passages to Jesus' claim of lordship over our lives. In the Book of Acts alone, Jesus is called Lord more than 90 times and Savior only twice. In Scripture, Jesus is referred to both as Lord and Savior, but the biblical emphasis lies on His lordship. This shows us that Jesus can only be our Savior if we acknowledge His authority and thus His claim of lordship over our lives.

Furthermore, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that we should accept Him as Lord and serve Him, allowing no compromises. Otherwise, we come under the rule of another lord, who is, of course, His adversary. Jesus said: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other." (Matthew 6:24)

The following Bible passages further demonstrate Jesus' claim of lordship and how important it is to submit to it: Acts 2:36 says, "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." Similarly, Acts 16:31 states, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." According to James, we should submit to God so that the dark powers have no hold over us.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a

ransom for all people.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6)* And in Revelation 19:16 it is written: “On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.” Paul also wrote: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:17)

Furthermore, in Colossians 3:23-24: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.”

The phrase “serve the Lord Jesus” proves that we are to be subject to Jesus. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:5: “For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.”

Followers of cheap grace, however, claim that Jesus never asserted to be Lord over His disciples. They say the word “Lord” is allegedly just a title, nothing more.

But if Jesus did not claim lordship, why did He say, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” Jesus does not give us free will as His disciples and insists on being our Lord. Therefore, His words are binding for us.

In Luke 6:46 and the following verses it says: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

Making Jesus Lord thus means making His word, like the Sermon on the Mount, the foundation of our lives. This, in turn, means building our lives on a rock.

Faith in the Biblical Sense Means Accepting Jesus as Shepherd and Thus as the True Lord

Followers of cheap grace claim that we should not accept Jesus as Lord because this would allegedly lead to legalism. But this is due to their confusing and equating obedience of faith with human self-righteous legalism modeled after the Pharisees, dismissing works of faithful obedience as legalism. Because they do not want to obey Jesus, they overlook that the Bible clearly tells us that we must obey Jesus by faith and that He is to be our Lord, which is even binding for salvation.

Followers of cheap grace therefore say that it is sufficient for salvation to accept Jesus as one's personal Savior from hell without accepting Him as Lord. But according to the Bible, saving and redeeming faith is not something optional or reducible to seeing Jesus merely as one's personal Savior from eternal damnation. The salvation brought by grace consists precisely in coming under the authority and lordship of Jesus. Jesus is to gain lordship and control over our lives through grace because our own ways are never pleasing to God or truly beneficial, and without Jesus' lordship, we follow paths that lead away from God.

That is why, according to the Bible, we need a Shepherd who takes the reins of our lives and guides us, so that we do not follow our own paths but those of the Good Shepherd. Grace gives us Jesus as the Good Shepherd so that through Him we may walk on the path of righteousness. The purpose of Jesus' sacrifice is precisely that we may follow this narrow way. And whoever rejects Jesus as Shepherd thereby rejects grace and Jesus Himself and will be lost. Scripture clearly and unmistakably says that without a shepherd we wander astray. All those without a shepherd who reject Jesus as their Shepherd are completely lost. In contrast, all true believers are sheep of Jesus who have accepted Him as Shepherd and walk the right path because they have entrusted themselves in faith to Jesus' leadership and lordship.

Thus, we are to make Jesus our Shepherd. To do this means to entrust His ways to Him in faith and to submit to His authority, because a shepherd leads the sheep and has authority over them. The sheep do not argue but simply follow him wherever he leads. A shepherd determines the way, and all his sheep listen to him because they see him as an authority to be obeyed, rely solely on him, and have abandoned their own ways. Therefore, Jesus as the Good Shepherd also asserts a claim of lordship over our lives, which all His sheep—and thus all who belong to Him—must fulfill.

Many say: I gladly accept Jesus as my Shepherd so I don't get lost, but He may not be my Lord who tells me the way, because I do not want to submit to His will. But Jesus cannot be our Shepherd if we reject His lordship. If a sheep runs away from the flock to go its own way, it has left the flock and lost its shepherd. The same applies to us. We cannot say to Jesus: Follow me as Shepherd while I go my own stubborn way. (Jesus only seeks the lost sheep to bring them back to the flock, but He does not walk along with their wrong ways.) A sheep cannot tell the shepherd: I determine the way. You follow me. The shepherd knows the right paths and therefore leads the sheep on the right way—not the other way around. So it is with Jesus. Jesus cannot bless or walk with our sinful and godless ways because He uncompromisingly denies sin. We are called to leave our sinful ways and follow Him.

Therefore, Jesus offers Himself only as our Redeemer, who is also Lord and Shepherd of our ways because He wants us to live dependent on Him and to turn to God. The acknowledgment of Jesus' lordship must not be separated from saving faith and grace. True faith means surrendering

one's life into Jesus' hands in self-capitulation, thus giving up self-rule and personal "control" over one's life to hand Jesus the scepter of power, belong to Him, and live dependent on Him. Grace gives us freedom from our sinful nature and instead Christ's lordship over our lives by removing our rebellious nature and giving us a spiritual nature submissive to Jesus. But this happens only if we are willing to give up our sinful life for Jesus' sake and repent. Otherwise, we are not truly believers, because true faith in Jesus means giving up self-righteousness and one's own self-righteous ways and instead relying on Jesus. True faith therefore requires giving up one's rebellious nature and sin so that Jesus can take lordship over one's life in place of the sinful self, and even requires voluntarily submitting to Jesus' lordship and acknowledging that it is impossible to master one's life and paths by oneself.

True faith is always Christ-centered, not just self-centered. Those who "call on" Jesus out of fear of hell and accept Him as Savior and Redeemer—but not as Lord—do not have a Christ-centered faith because they want only deliverance from hell and their own salvation, but not Christ Himself as the center of their life. The true believer comes to Jesus so that He lives in their heart and rules from there as their Shepherd because they want to make Jesus the center of their life. The true believer submits to Jesus' lordship to give Him full leadership and command over their life as the Good Shepherd because they have realized they must repent.

We are to submit to Jesus' lordship so that we are kept from human legalistic works righteousness. For if Jesus is our Lord and our actions are entrusted to Him, then obviously we do not try to become righteous by our (human) works. How can we think or act legalistically if we entrust our lives to Jesus as the Good Shepherd, live under His spiritual guidance, think and act by His Spirit, and follow only His ways? We are only legalistic by the usual definition if we rely on our human works instead of Jesus and act independently and self-righteously by our own power to justify ourselves by works. This can never be the case if we submit to Jesus as Lord.

It must be understood: as long as we entrust our deeds to Jesus as the Good Shepherd and submit to Him, we do not build on our own (human) works but offer ourselves to Jesus so that He works in us and through us, so that we act only from faith, excluding human legalism.

The accusation of legalism against Jesus' sheep is therefore utter nonsense, because as long as we entrust all our steps and deeds to Jesus, human legalism is completely excluded. Conversely, we become legalistic when we act independently and walk our own independent paths, which is always the case when we reject Jesus' lordship. If we do not make Jesus our Shepherd, we are left to ourselves, build on our own righteousness, and can do nothing but rely on our own human works. It is therefore a profound irony that followers of cheap grace accuse true Christians of being legalistic simply because they submit to Jesus' authority and acknowledge Him as their Lord and Shepherd.

Followers of cheap grace do not understand that saving faith bears fruit

The fruits of faith cannot be separated from the process of salvation, since they are life-giving and even cause and establish our salvation by grace. Let us take the miracle of spiritual rebirth as an example to make this truth clear. The rebirth that comes from faith is an indispensable fruit of faith that brings us salvation. Jesus said to Nicodemus that without this rebirth we can never enter the kingdom of God. By virtue of this rebirth, which is a sovereign act of grace, we are, according to John, children of God who, unlike worldly people, do not continue in sin. It is therefore a fruit of faith that we stop sinning when we truly walk in grace.

The truth is that only a faith which inwardly changes us by its fruit-bearing effect—indeed, which makes us new sanctified people and grants mercy as a fruit of the Spirit—saves. It is wrongly said that naked and fruitless faith, which shows no effect, would save in its dead state, and that we are justified before God without the fruit of faith. The Bible never says that saving faith grants us salvation so that we can continue living a fruitless life for God. On the contrary, it tells us that grace produces fruit in us so that we become testimonies of God's love and goodness (see Psalm 25:10). By means of the rebirth, grace transforms us into people who live in a spiritual nature. This nature expresses its righteousness in good deeds, so that as a result of rebirth, it is natural for us to do good works.

These are the so-called works of faith (works we do out of faith). By doing works of faith, we show that, because of rebirth, we have a spiritual mindset, live supernaturally, and have a new being in Jesus. Works of faith, which are always truly good works before God, prove that we are connected to the divine power source of grace and have been renewed and justified through rebirth. They are therefore not additional works to grace, since they are themselves wrought by grace and are even the fruit of a saving and living faith that accompanies true faith. If we do not perform works of faith or good deeds as believers, then something must be wrong with our faith. Possibly, we have fallen away from faith or were never truly converted. For the new spiritual nature given through rebirth to a saved person—which is the love of Jesus—would deny itself if it did not manifest in the fruit of good deeds. Through good works, we can visibly testify to our salvation, although they are not the root of our salvation.

To illustrate this truth, I want to compare the saved person who is reborn to a newly planted tree. The root of the tree is holy because it is Christ. It represents the righteousness of the tree, and from it come holy nutrients that keep the tree alive inside. These nutrients stand for the fruits of the Spirit and testify to the holy root. They keep the tree vital and ensure that beautiful fruits grow, which can be harvested.

These fruits that can be harvested are the part of the tree that is externally visible and bears witness to the healthy root and the quality of its inner nutrients. They represent the visible deeds of the Christian. They cannot be missing or rotten. Missing good fruits or rotten fruits would contradict the nature of the holy root, which produces "inner nutrients" like mercy and love, from which the outward fruits grow. Therefore, visible good fruits also belong to the new person who is saved. And so the Bible says: If we live by the grace of God, we will automatically bear fruit for God and do works of faith that testify to our repentance. Every good deed we do by grace is therefore not an addition to faith, but a fruit of faith or a work of faith that testifies to our standing as righteous and reborn Christians.

Followers of cheap grace do not understand what saving faith really means

Saving faith in Jesus is defined as trust in the person of Jesus. All who call themselves Christians agree on this because this truth is found in the Bible. But what exactly does this trust mean? Believers would all answer this question quite differently. For followers of cheap grace, trusting in Christ means believing that Jesus died for them, accepting Him as Savior, and confessing this. But the Bible tells us: Trusting in Jesus means more than simply entrusting yourself to Him; it means dedicating your life to Him. Only a faith that includes this trust saves.

Salvation through faith happens only when we place all our trust in the person of Jesus and surrender our lives to Him without any conditions. The goal of this surrender of life is to let go of our own life and make Jesus our life's purpose so that He becomes our entire identity and righteousness.

Therefore, it must be emphasized: saving faith is not limited to intellectually acknowledging what Jesus did, since it relates to a living person. And to this living person, we are to dedicate ourselves in a life surrender. We are to belong to this person so that He can have authority over us. Only when this is the case do we have a living faith that saves us.

Thus, it can be stated: Followers of cheap grace do not have saving faith that involves this form of trust in the person of Jesus. Followers of cheap grace trust in Jesus' willingness to forgive. They believe in what He did on the cross, but they only formally appeal to His work and do not gratefully accept it. Likewise, they only formally appeal to the person of Jesus because their faith does not seek the living Christ. They want Jesus as Savior from hell without making Him their life's purpose.

According to common understanding, they have saving faith because they acknowledge what Jesus did for them, officially accept Jesus' saving work, and confess Him with their mouth. But this is not true, because biblical faith means so much more than intellectually believing in Jesus' work and formally acknowledging Him as Savior in order to enter the kingdom of

heaven. After all, we are supposed to receive Jesus into us, and this is an indispensable prerequisite for a saving sonship according to John. This means we must receive Jesus in our hearts, which happens through a true surrender of life that commits the heart to Him.

Thus, a dead faith without turning to Jesus cannot bring us righteousness before God, because such faith does not unite us with Jesus and therefore does not transform or justify us.

Therefore, we must be aware that our faith in Jesus only saves when it unites us with Jesus, thus containing a living power and bearing fruit. To come to a living faith, we must enter into a life-changing relationship with Jesus that produces fruit. How does this happen? It happens when, as said, we entrust ourselves to Jesus and thereby consent to this life-changing relationship.

Living and saving faith is nothing more than saying “yes” to a relationship with Jesus to make Christ the center of our life. This relationship can only be given to us as a gift because we cannot earn or achieve it through good works. We can therefore only ask for it in faith.

Living faith is thus nothing other than a humble cry for help that we send out. It says: Jesus, I acknowledge that I am a sinner. I ask You to tear out my sinful heart. Give me the fruit of repentance to lead a changed life. Jesus, You see I do not have my own life under control. Save me from myself, my sinful self. I ask You to crucify my flesh. Rule over me so that I have a shepherd who determines the way for me. Give me as the fruit of faith the strength to submit to You by granting me a spiritual nature that submits to You and is subject to God. And with that, I ask You for guidance over my life through Your Spirit. Give me a new life because I have no righteousness of my own according to Your word. Give me Your righteousness so that I may become self-sacrificing. Give me the strength to deny myself and to let go of all my selfish thoughts. Give me humility to live under Your grace. I ask You that I may live for You, and I ask You to enter into a relationship with me.

All these requests are spoken inwardly by a truly believing heart, even if not consciously. This is the secret of faith that brings us grace. After all, we are to come to Jesus as spiritually poor who are not boastful but say to Jesus: I am sick. Be my doctor who heals me.

To come to living faith, we apparently must come to Jesus completely humbly and ask for His gifts of grace. This should happen in expectation and trust that they will be given to us. Through this, we receive all gifts of grace. As simple as this biblical truth sounds, we must not doubt it.

Jesus Himself said: Whoever asks will receive. Whoever knocks, the door will be opened. Whoever seeks will find. Therefore, to receive the gifts of grace, we do not need any initiative of our own, as we are to receive them through simple asking in faith.

Thus, living faith merely requires that we honestly call on Jesus so that He changes us according to His will. This allows Jesus to sanctify us and claim His gifts of grace.

But only the one who calls on Jesus with an honest, praying heart can do this—someone who appreciates His gifts of grace due to their own awareness of sin and who longs for true holiness through these gifts of grace.

Our goal in faith should therefore be to claim Jesus' gifts of grace in order to live in holiness.

And Jesus will grant us this holiness if we hold fast to this goal. And since grace gives us everything we inwardly need for our salvation, our redemption is a pure gift.

This means that we truly must rely completely on faith and are thus saved. Because grace brings us the gifts of grace as a gift of faith.

That is why the Bible says salvation is given to us through faith. Through the power of the gifts of grace, we automatically live holy lives and turn away from sin.

Whoever does not understand or appreciate this does not understand the meaning of grace and rejects the richness of the gifts of grace and thereby the person of Jesus.

The Gospel of Cheap Grace Leads to Religious Self-Deception

Followers of cheap grace blame God's law for their sins. By judging God's law instead of their own sins, they refuse to take responsibility for their sins and do not use God's law to convict themselves of their wrongdoing. The gospel of cheap grace thus leads to religious self-deception, because without the law, one cannot properly assess one's own righteousness. According to Paul, without the law, we cannot understand our need for salvation and cannot sincerely ask Jesus for forgiveness and transformation. Logically, we can only accept grace as atonement when we recognize our guilt through God's commandments. Grace credits Jesus' atoning sacrifice as the penalty for our sins—but this logically presupposes an awareness of our own guilt. Therefore, we should not judge the law, but judge our sin, because the law is only a mirror that shows us what is righteous in God's eyes.

Sin, however, is not the result of the law, but comes from our corrupt human nature. Paul therefore said, "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Yet I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet!'" (Romans 7:7)

Here, he quotes from the law that God wrote on the stone tablets—the Ten Commandments. The commandment Paul quoted forbids the desires

that lie within our human nature. Therefore, obviously, our humanly corrupted heart alone is unacceptable to God and guilty according to God's law. For this reason, we need Jesus' atoning sacrifice to be freed from our guilt. But those who think there are no binding moral demands in the New Covenant do not need justification through grace anyway.

Without binding morality, we would not need justification through Jesus' atonement and grace would not be necessary. Those who overlook or deny their sins will never be able to open themselves to grace, never understand grace, and never find God through grace.

According to the Gospel of Cheap Grace, God's commandments are abolished by the cross of Jesus. According to the Bible, they are eternal.

The eternal validity of the Ten Commandments is often rejected with the superficial argument that the Ten Commandments belong to the Old Testament and are therefore outdated, belonging to the Old Covenant rather than the New Covenant. However, this argument is highly questionable in itself because the Ten Commandments are cited and affirmed at many points in the New Testament.

Many say that under grace only love matters, and that love as the fruit of the Spirit is demanded instead of keeping the commandments. In contrast, lawless Christians claim that under grace the Ten Commandments are abolished because Jesus supposedly abolished all Old Testament commandments on the cross.

Yet we read in Moses 6:4-5:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart."

The commandment to love was therefore not founded by Jesus. We already read in Leviticus (3rd Moses) 19:17-18:

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

This commandment in the Old Testament resembles the Sermon on the Mount; it speaks of sincere love and not wishing harm to one's enemies. According to this Bible passage, we should not hold grudges but forgive instead of repaying evil with evil. Before the announcement of this commandment under Moses, which we can read in Leviticus, God admonished not to steal, not to deceive, to fear God, not to judge unfairly, not to speak ill of one's neighbor, and so forth.

Love for one's neighbor is thus concretized in a holy behavior that corresponds to the Ten Commandments. At the beginning of this chapter

in Moses, God said:

“You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”

Jesus did not replace the Old Testament moral demands with the commandment of love, since this command already includes all moral instructions and was already concretely addressed and known in the Old Testament (see Moses 6:4-5). Rather, He took up the old commandment of love from the Old Testament and said in John 13:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you.”

One might say that Jesus called it a new commandment and therefore it cannot be old. But Jesus only wanted to emphasize with the term “new commandment” that this command is to be fulfilled in a new way through Him or through the Gospel. In the Johannine epistles, John calls the commandment of love both old and new. New in the view of the New Covenant is that we realize this commandment in Jesus and that Jesus wants to fulfill this command perfectly in us—because without Jesus this commandment cannot be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the commandment of love is old because it already exists in the Old Testament and was already a demand of God in the Old Covenant.

Thus, Jesus cannot have abolished all Old Testament moral demands. If all Old Testament commandments had been abolished by the grace of Jesus, then the commandment of love would no longer be binding, which would fundamentally contradict the whole Bible.

Other Bible passages that show Jesus did not abolish the commandments include:

- Psalm 119:52: “The LORD, when I think on Your ordinances, I meditate on Your ways.”
- Deuteronomy (5 Moses) 5:29f: God said that the attitude to fear God and keep His commandments shall last forever, so that it may go well with His people forever.
- Deuteronomy 11:1: “Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always.”
- Deuteronomy 5:29: “Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it might be well with them and their children forever!”
- Psalm 119:150-156: David praises God’s law as eternal truth and asks for help, declaring he will never forget God’s law.
- Psalm 119:142: “Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth.”

- Psalm 119:160: "The sum of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever."
- Psalm 119:96: "I have seen an end of all perfection, but Your commandment is exceedingly broad."
- Psalm 111:7-8: "The works of His hands are truth and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness."
- Luke 16:17: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail."
- Matthew 5:18 (similar teaching)
- Psalm 119:112: David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declares God's statutes are good and he will keep them forever.
- Moses (Leviticus) also states it is good to keep God's commandments always.

This proves that it has always been good and will remain good forever to follow the commandments, and they do not have an expiration date.

Many argue that Israel received the law of Moses, so everyone who is not an Israelite does not need to obey God's laws or moral demands. But it would be absurd to assume that God does not require the Ten Commandments from us non-Israelites just because the Jewish people received the stone tablet law.

God predicted that His law would be eternal not only for Israel but also for Gentiles or foreigners. In Numbers 15:15-16 we read: "One law and one ordinance shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you. It shall be for you and for your descendants throughout your generations a statute forever, as you are; so shall the stranger be before the LORD. One law and one statute shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you."

By saying the stranger shall be equal to Israel, God refers to the New Covenant, which leads to equality between Jews and Gentiles. Thus, two common lies about God's grace are exposed: one, that Jesus through grace abolishes the law, and two, that God's moral law was only meant for Jews and does not apply to Gentiles.

Another common lie is that God's moral law applies only to unbelievers who are not under grace. But God said His law is eternal for Israel, which is supposed to be the eternally redeemed people, and He spoke in the above verse about the redeemed congregation which exists forever and also lives in the New Covenant.

The prophet Isaiah further clarifies that the Sabbath is a sign for all whom God counts as His people. Notice that God addresses not only Israel (Isaiah 56:1-2), but also specifically foreigners (Isaiah 56:3,6-7) and eunuchs (Isaiah 56:3-4). This universal belonging to God is emphasized again (Isaiah 56:8).

Thus, God's moral law applies to everyone, and keeping the commandments is a mark of the redeemed. Even the Sabbath commandment will play a role on the new earth, for believers will gather every new moon and Sabbath to worship God (Isaiah 66:22-23):

"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me," says the LORD, "So shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD."

According to the Gospel of Cheap Grace, everything worldly is permitted, in contrast to the true Gospel.

If the narrow way of the Sermon on the Mount were not binding for salvation, as the Gospel of Cheap Grace suggests, then as Christians we would be allowed to walk on the broad way of the world. However, Paul wrote:

"Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

"World" and "will of God" are the two central terms in this passage. The world is thus opposed to God and His will, and therefore stands in opposition to Jesus. About Jesus it is said in Galatians 1:4:

"Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father."

Therefore, we oppose God if we live worldly lives. In James 4:4 it says that we must not walk on the broad way of the world if we want to have friendship with God.

Friendship with the immoral lifestyle of the people in the world is enmity against God. If we think and act like the world and are thus oriented toward our ego, we testify that we belong to the world (see 1 John 5:1).

This is confirmed by the following statements in 1 John 2:15-17:

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

From this, it becomes clear: The world stands for fleshly desires and appeals to the God-opposing flesh or the natural human. It will pass away. Only those who belong to Jesus and have grace may live forever in bliss, because they do the will of God.

(Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires in order to live for the will of God.)

This makes it clear: The Christian is crucified to the worldly. Paul wrote about this:

“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Thus, it is necessary to deny the worldly in order to confess Christ, for we cannot love both Jesus and the world. We can only bind ourselves to Jesus if we completely renounce the world. Therefore, the following words of Jesus must be taken seriously:

“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny before my Father in heaven. What you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and what you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

And so we should detach ourselves from everything that binds us to the world, in order to find our salvation in Christ and become eternally blessed. The standards of the world therefore do not apply to a Christian. Paul said about this:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.”

The Gospel of Cheap Grace turns the holy God of the Bible into an idol.

The fear of God means to kneel before God's holiness. A God-fearing person is inwardly overwhelmed by the holiness of God. They are aware that God is worthy of honor and that His holiness is a reason for worship. A God-fearing person “trembles” before the holiness of God because they fear—or better yet, worship—it. They recognize that God’s holiness is not to be taken lightly, and therefore they want to fully submit to God out of humility and deep respect for Him.

The fear of God is an appropriate response to God’s holiness and is expected by God (see Luke 12:4-5 or Hebrews 10:30). God delights in those who fear Him (see Psalm 147:11), because they value His holiness and therefore keep His commandments (see Psalm 112:1):

“Hallelujah! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!”

Conversely, God does not delight in people who lack the fear of God. According to Scripture, they are considered godless because they do not value His holiness and do not humbly submit to God. Likewise, someone without the fear of God will not take His commandments seriously. That is why the Bible explicitly demands it, for example:

“How much more should you live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God” (2 Peter 3:11-12).

In summary, fear of God is essential for a healthy and good relationship with God. Only those who have the fear of God truly appreciate His

holiness and submit to Him because they worship Him and gladly serve Him.

Without the fear of God, we cannot be righteous; thus, it is a mark of all the righteous who are saved. Grace grants us the fear of God so that we become obedient to God and walk the path of the righteous. Therefore, fear of God, grace, and obedience belong together, as Psalm 103:17-18 expresses:

“But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children’s children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.”

Through fear of God, we are in agreement with Him, as Psalm 86:11, Jeremiah 32:9, and many other Bible passages prove. Since the fear of God is connected with our salvation, Paul exhorts the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. He also commanded the Corinthians to cleanse themselves from all defilement and to perfect holiness in the fear of God (2 Corinthians 7:1). The fear of God can therefore by no means be separated from our salvation.

According to Psalm 2:11, we should serve God with reverence, and the following verse makes clear that we should submit ourselves to His Son Jesus. The fear of God thus leads to our submission to Jesus and means bowing to His and God’s authority. Certainly, this should not be done out of fear, but in a reverent attitude of respect.

An example of reverence is Jesus Himself, who, according to Isaiah, has a spirit of the fear of God. In contrast, followers of cheap grace reduce God to a buddy with whom one can relate on an equal footing. They do not value His holiness and authority and do not recognize His majesty and sovereignty, because they think He would deny His standards of value for a cheap salvation.

The Gospel of Cheap Grace Is Founded on Unbelief

To believe does not mean to walk by sight, but to live in hope and confidence that God's promises are true. To believe in the biblical sense means to consciously build one’s life on God and to place all one’s hope in Him. Faith means to entrust oneself to God amid the uncertainties of life and to risk everything for Him. This happens out of love and devotion, as well as trust, in true believers. Therefore, Paul wrote in Hebrews 10:38: “But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.” According to this passage, whoever turns away from God is no longer founded in faith. True faith, on the other hand, means being faithful to God and turning to Him.

True faith thus means living for God and honestly surrendering oneself to Him. Furthermore, the Bible tells us that true faith establishes a connection to God and means living and acting out of His power. Through true faith, a person lives by God’s power because they place their life in

God's hands and voluntarily submit to God's dependence. Thus, they can accomplish supernatural things by drawing from God's strength.

That is why, according to Hebrews 11, people were able to fight lions without fear and conquer enemies who were stronger. We read in Hebrews 11:32-40:

"What more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect."

True faith, therefore, means trusting God in everything and dedicating one's life to Him. Holding firmly to all the promises of faith and trusting them is natural for the true believer. According to Hebrews 11, this also applies to unlikely promises for which the believer waits patiently.

That is why Hebrews 11:1 says:

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

As believers, we do not judge what God says by human wisdom but accept it without doubt because God cannot err. A true Christian would not say: "The Sermon on the Mount is surely not applicable because it exceeds my human imagination; therefore, I reject it." A true believer reads the Sermon on the Mount with the eyes of faith and asks God for the strength to put it into practice. They do not doubt the feasibility of the Sermon on the Mount, because that would mean doubting God's word and Jesus Himself.

And what about followers of cheap grace? They turn to God outwardly but not inwardly. Followers of cheap grace reduce God to a kind grandfather in heaven—a sort of second Santa Claus—who is only important as a gift-giver to them. They try to maintain a kind of business relationship with God. They want gifts from Him by doing something for Him merely formally and try to please God through certain pious gestures.

The true believer wants to serve God out of devotion, without expecting a direct return. They serve Jesus solely out of love and dedication to God. Followers of cheap grace therefore lack the devotion of true faith. They

are not truly interested in God but pretend interest for selfish reasons. Therefore, they do not want to dedicate their lives to Him and turn back by the power of grace. Out of lack of humility, followers of cheap grace refuse to acknowledge God's authority and deny that grace calls for a Christlike life, practically rejecting all promises of grace. Thus, they do not believe God's word. They do not believe they are called to true discipleship and pay no attention to Jesus' call to follow Him because they reject all the promises of true discipleship and refuse even to believe them. Ultimately, they are not interested in being true disciples who remain in Jesus' word and live by it. They want to live stubbornly and not submit to God, which is why they distort and twist His word and claim that following Jesus is neither demanded nor possible by grace.

True believers, on the other hand, feel called to follow Jesus and believe that life-changing grace is given for this purpose because this clearly emerges from God's word. Moreover, they believe all Jesus' words, including His promise that we can do even greater works than He did on earth. Furthermore, Jesus promised His disciples that they would be distinguished by truly good works that bear witness to His light. According to Jesus, no one can overlook the light of His disciples, for they shine like a city on a hill. Followers of cheap grace do not believe any of this, although Jesus said it very clearly. Instead of believing in the true Jesus with His promises, they cling only to religious thinking. This religious thinking does not correspond in the slightest to the living faith of true disciples. Therefore, the faith of followers of cheap grace does not even deserve the term "faith" in the biblical sense, because saving faith is realized in a firm trust in the person of Jesus and His words—and this trust is exactly what followers of cheap grace lack.

They deny the power of grace and do not believe in true grace, so their faith content does not correspond to the faith convictions of true Christians. Paul said about such people who do not have true faith: "Because of them the name of God is blasphemed." He further said: "They have a form of godliness but deny its power." Those who deny the power of the gospel like followers of cheap grace therefore have no biblical faith but live in unbelief—even as nominal Christians. Consequently, followers of cheap grace cannot produce works of faith. This includes not only extraordinary heroic deeds but simply works that testify to the light of the gospel. Because of unbelief, they do not live from the promises of faith. Only true faith grants us all the blessings of the heavenly realm for the fulfillment of promises. Without this faith, we can never experience the power of grace and testify to it in our works. This means that without true faith, we live completely unchanged, because only true faith grants power.

To give an example of how much we depend on faith to testify in the works of Jesus, I would like to refer to Matthew 17. In verse 19 of this chapter, Jesus told His disciples that they could not perform His miracles because they lacked the faith to do so. How much more do followers of cheap grace lack the power of grace and faith! They are not only weak in faith but without biblical faith, as they are not even willing to surrender

their lives for Christ's sake and believe His promises, much less to put them into practice. Their faith in God is merely a nice hope and a religious conviction based on a worldview. They are religious but in the biblical sense unbelieving, because they do not want to build on God. They do not even know the true God because they do not earnestly seek Him, and therefore they possess no saving faith. Saving faith in Jesus means to turn completely to God and thus live consciously dependent on Him. This happens when we place all our hope on true grace.

The Gospel of Cheap Grace Does Not Require Willingness to Suffer for Jesus

Followers of cheap grace say that faith in Jesus serves self-interest and a comfortable life according to their own wishes. They essentially say: God is our Father through faith in Jesus. A father wants his children to be well and feel comfortable. Therefore, God aligns with our wishes. Our faith in Jesus serves a life according to our ideas. We should always follow what makes us feel good. Everything we do in faith should benefit us because God wants our earthly happiness. As our Father, He will fulfill all our wishes. As Christians, we will be financially well-off. We should indulge ourselves with our money because God desires nothing more than for us to be well. He has promised us that we will have everything if we believe in Jesus. These statements are absurd because the gospel of God does not promise earthly happiness. It contains no promise of material prosperity. Rather, Scripture warns against a prosperity gospel. The church of Laodicea claimed to be rich, full, and lacking nothing—exactly the characteristics of the prosperity gospel. God's word about this church in Revelation 3:19 says: "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. Therefore be earnest and repent!" The true gospel tells us that in our earthly life we should not be focused on prosperity or attached to anything earthly, because all our striving for happiness should be directed toward Jesus as the precious pearl. Since He is infinitely important to us, we must accept everything for Him and live for Him according to the true gospel. According to the Bible, as many admonitions show, we are to hold fast to the gospel even under conditions of suffering by focusing our entire life purpose and attention on Jesus. The idea that discipleship is tied to wellness conditions lacks any biblical foundation and stands in contrast to the gospel. Furthermore, people who think more about themselves than about Jesus are opposed to the apostles in the Bible.

Paul, who played a leading role among them, wanted to do everything for Jesus. He even called it a privilege to suffer for Jesus and advised the church in Philippi to take his path of suffering for the faith as an example. He wrote from prison to encourage the Philippians. In Philippians 1:27-30:

"Above all, live your life as a community in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Whether I come to see you or only hear about you, I want you all to stand firm in one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel. Do not be intimidated by your opponents. Your courage will prove that they are doomed, but you are saved by God. You have not only the

privilege to believe in Christ but also to suffer for him. You are now fighting the same battle I am.”

As this passage shows, Paul encouraged the churches to endure persecution for Christ’s sake and endure trials, teaching everything but a feel-good gospel. He told the Philippians that it had been given to them not only to believe in Jesus but also to suffer for Him and fight the battle of faith successfully. He emphasized that suffering for the gospel’s sake is blessed if it is accepted with a joyful heart. Thus, Paul did not consider suffering for Christ simply a bitter cup to drink. He even encouraged the Philippians to rejoice if he died a martyr’s death, pointing out that he joyfully accepted this shame:

“When Jesus Christ comes, I will be proud of you that I did not serve you in vain and did not labor in vain. Even if I die and my blood is shed as a sacrificial offering for your faith, I am full of joy. Yes, I rejoice with all of you. If you also rejoice, rejoice with me!”

From this we see that he was willing to shed his blood as a sacrificial offering for the faith and die a martyr’s death. The apostle Paul indeed died as a martyr and lived so that his teachings and example serve as a model for all Christians. Therefore, we cannot say that radical discipleship of Jesus is impossible. Likewise, we cannot say that the many biblical admonitions to uncompromising discipleship involving self-denial are mere misprints in the Bible.

The Bible clearly states that we must prove ourselves in our faith. Only those who endure severe trials of faith will be truly justified before God according to Scripture. James says the crown of righteousness awaits us if we endure trials. God will not award a crown of righteousness to nominal Christians who avoid suffering. Only the one who can prove their righteousness and is willing to walk rocky paths for the sake of righteousness is righteous before God. The following Bible passages indicate that true Christians must be willing to suffer for the gospel: “Since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same attitude—because whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin—to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human desires but by the will of God.”

1 Peter 4:1-2 (ELB)

In James 1:2-4 it says:

“My brothers and sisters, consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.”

And in 1 Peter 2:21:

“Because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps.”

In 1 Peter 4:12-13:

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on

you to test you, as though something strange were happening. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed."

Paul also said:

"For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for Him."

Philippians 1:29

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, urging them not to waver despite hardships. Romans 8:17 states that we are heirs of God's kingdom if we suffer with Jesus and are glorified with Him in suffering for God.

Hebrews 10:32-36 says:

"Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised."

In the letter to Smyrna in Revelation it says:

"You will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

In line with this message from Revelation are these verses:

Jesus said (Luke 21:19), "By your endurance you will gain your lives."

James 1:12 says:

"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

In Philippians 1:27-30:

"The most important thing is that you live as a community worthy of the good news of Christ. Stand firm together in the same spirit! Fight together for the faith rooted in the good news. Don't be intimidated by your opponents! God wants to show them that they are lost, but that you are saved. God has given you the grace not only to trust in Christ but also to suffer for Him. You have the same fight to endure as I do."

1 Peter 4:12-13 states:

"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. Instead, rejoice that you share in Christ's sufferings, so that you may be glad when His glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of glory rests on you. Of course, no one should suffer as a murderer or thief or troublemaker. But if you suffer as a Christian, don't be ashamed. Praise God that you bear His name."

Judgment begins with God's family. If it starts with us, what will happen to those who reject God's message?"

From this it is clear: suffering for our faith is a test that deepens our faith in Jesus and teaches us to endure patiently for our faith. 1 Peter 1:7 adds: "Your faith, tested by fire, may be found genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Paul also wrote that God sends us tests of patience that we must pass for our salvation, because God's promises depend on our perseverance: "We want each of you to show the same diligence to the very end, so that you may be confident in your hope. Then you will not be sluggish but will imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what God has promised."

Thus, for true followers, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:4: "In everything we show ourselves to be God's servants: in great endurance, in troubles, hardships, and distresses, in beatings, imprisonments, riots, hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience, and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor."

Therefore: "Only the one who 'overcomes' and remains faithful 'to the end' will be clothed with white garments, and the Lord will give him the crown of life, and his name will not be erased from the book of life." (Revelation 3:5)

The gospel of Jesus does not exclude suffering and sacrifice for Him. On the contrary, it calls us to live the gospel by sacrifice, denial of self, and willingness to suffer. Those who reject suffering deny a fundamental part of biblical discipleship. The so-called gospel of cheap grace is a false gospel that promises a comfortable, suffering-free life for believers, which the Bible clearly rejects.

The true Gospel demands self-denial, which is also connected with following Jesus through identification with him.

It is obvious that as true Christians we want to bear witness to Jesus and follow him. And discipleship means truly following in Jesus' footsteps. A serious discipleship costs us self-denial, because Jesus' path of life consists in total self-denial and devotion to God. Whoever wants to follow Jesus and is not willing to leave everything behind, take everything upon himself and deny his ego, will never be able to walk in Jesus' footsteps, and should better not even try. Jesus said it would be just as ridiculous to want to follow him carelessly as to build a tower without estimating the costs. In the end, the tower would not be finished, and so the costs for building the tower would be completely wasted. In addition, the unfinished tower would only lead to laughter. And so, according to the metaphor, it leads to a fiasco when people want to follow Jesus, but do

not recognize and calculate the costs of discipleship. This makes it clear that Jesus values quality over quantity and that fans who carelessly follow him do not meet his demands. The Bible also clearly shows us the difference between a follower and fans, because it tells us about both fans and followers.

We learn from the Bible: Many fans flocked to Jesus after he publicly performed miracles, because they hoped in him as the Messiah. Thus, many of these followers - whole masses of people - gathered when Jesus proclaimed the Sermon on the Mount. But instead of the hoped-for shallow gospel, Jesus only proclaimed salvation to those who choose the narrow path of discipleship. Almost all of them then left him because they wanted a Messiah who promised them a cheap salvation. Thus they belonged to a fan movement that liked to surround him to get an autograph card from him that would bring them grace. They saw in him an intangible idol and a savior who would give them cheap grace. But when they realized that Jesus wanted to intervene in their lives, calling them to lead an uncomfortable life, they no longer wanted to follow him and even completely lost interest in him.

And so Jesus' followers left the Messiah because, contrary to their expectations, he gave them no bread to eat after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. They did not follow him further, for they had not calculated the cost of discipleship beforehand and never truly belonged to Jesus. The Bible finally says about these people who left Jesus that they never belonged to him, for otherwise they would have followed him under all circumstances. And thus a clear dividing line should be drawn between a follower of Jesus and a fan. A follower takes Jesus' words seriously: "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, there must my servant be also." John 12:26. To be able to serve Jesus, it is necessary according to this Bible passage to be a true follower. And a true follower will always be where Jesus is. A follower is therefore always and everywhere with Jesus

on the way, because he wants to live connected with him. Followers move with Jesus because they have recognized the seriousness of the Gospel mission. They never want to separate from him and want to live connected with him.

Jesus fans, on the other hand, do not feel connected to Jesus, but are attracted to him and are enthusiastic about him. But their enthusiasm for Jesus is typical of fans and is therefore very limited. Let's look at typical fans, and it becomes clear why this is so. A fan is not really interested in his idol and does not even really know his idol. Therefore, his admiration for his idol remains superficial. He is at the same time intoxicated by the fame and glamour of his idol and therefore likes to come to his performances. He wants to stand in the glory of his idol and leaves his idol after a public appearance. A fan therefore sympathizes with his idol, nothing more. His enthusiasm for his idol is reduced to pure infatuation, for he is not in a relationship with his idol.

Fans are therefore inwardly distant from their idol. They may in some way be devoted to their idol, hang up posters of their idol, and take a certain example from their idol. But they do not dedicate their lives to their idol. So they quickly turn away from their idol, and their enthusiasm and admiration for the idol can also wane or completely disappear from one moment to the next. A fan thus holds his idol high, exalts it to heaven, and drops it just as quickly. Jesus fans show this behavior as well. Thus, the Jesus fans followed the Messiah at public appearances of his miracles, while they did not want to follow his way of the cross. The follower of Jesus, on the other hand, shares his life path with Jesus and bears the cross of discipleship. His inner, passionate love for Jesus gives him the necessary spice to salt the earth and serve Jesus with full devotion. A follower lives in a relationship with Jesus and fights by his side for his Gospel mission. He is not content with a spectator seat to see Jesus. Rather, he is in the playing field of the spiritual battle of faith by denying himself to walk with Jesus. His devotion to Jesus motivates him to do so. This devotion is lacking in Jesus fans. Fans, despite outward enthusiasm for Jesus, are inwardly lukewarm and lead a bland life of faith. Accordingly, they show no true commitment to Jesus. Outwardly, this may not always be noticeable, because outward worship of Jesus is part of their fan cult in most cases. Jesus fans also come to church to praise Jesus.

Their fan cult includes fan gatherings. For example, they like to come to church festivals to celebrate Jesus. They also like to exchange ideas about their faith on social media. Even in Bible reading, fans of Jesus do not necessarily lag behind followers. Outwardly, they may engage in church and contribute their services just like the followers. But all their Christian activities and services in church are worthless because they are not done for the glory of Jesus and are not dedicated to the true Jesus. Fans cannot dedicate their lives and their actions to Jesus. For they believe in a Jesus who gives away his Gospel for free. Such a Jesus does not exist according to the true Gospel. So they do not know Jesus and are not able to grasp the responsibility of discipleship, let alone take it upon themselves and bear it.

And therefore Jesus said to fans the following harsh words (see Luke): "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid the foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, then while the other is still a long way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use

either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." According to this Bible quote, it is obvious what Jesus thinks of his fans. He told them that they are unsuitable for his mission because they cannot follow him and are unwilling and unable to calculate and bear the costs of discipleship. According to the above Bible quote, they cannot salt the earth and are like bland salt that is thrown away because it has no saltiness and is useless. Salt that is useless and thrown away is a metaphor for nominal Christians. Thus, Jesus did not count his fans among true Christians and not among his true circle of disciples.

Yes, he even compared them to bland salt that is disposed of as worthless. Only those who truly commit themselves to the cost of discipleship are therefore true Christians and true disciples and belong to his holy people. And it is obvious: Adherents of cheap grace do not calculate the cost of discipleship, are at best fans of Jesus and not followers. They out themselves as fans of Jesus, instead of confessing him from the heart and accepting him as their Lord. They do not even come up with the idea of following Jesus, let alone on his terms, because they do not recognize him as the precious pearl. They believe that the grace of Jesus is so cheap that it is thrown at every fan. Since Jesus, according to his own statements, does not reject anyone who comes to him, they count themselves as fans among his self-proclaimed followers, friends, and disciples. They overlook the fact that Jesus rejected people like the rich young ruler who came to him as fans and were half-hearted. Jesus never promised his grace to such fans. On the contrary. He disillusioned them and referred them to the necessity of discipleship on his radical terms. And so it says in the Bible that only true worshipers belong to Jesus, who worship him in the spirit of truth and surrender themselves to him with all their heart. A true worshiper does not run after Jesus for a fan card, but makes himself available to him to do his will, because he wants to live entirely for Jesus. This is the meaning of our redemption and our being Christian. After all, we were not bought free from sin to continue living for ourselves.

Whoever clings to his life therefore does not understand the true calling of a Christian. This is the case with adherents of cheap grace, for they do not understand that they owe Jesus discipleship. For them, Jesus is a great hero and yet no more than a ticket to heaven, for in their eyes he does not deserve true devotion as an answer to his love and his work of redemption. They do not want to accept him as the Messiah as he is. They welcome him as long as he fits into their ideas. They are like the people from Jesus' fan community who shouted Hosanna to hail Jesus as Messiah and liberator. Some time later they wanted to get rid of him because he did not meet their expectations and advocated his crucifixion. Jesus fans stand on the sidelines to cheer for Jesus and yet betray him in the end. They risk nothing for Jesus. This is quite different with followers of Jesus. They understand that being a Christian only begins where one's own path is abandoned for Jesus.

Summary:

Fans elevate Jesus to the status of an impressive star or a "movie hero" who seems interesting due to his superpowers. However, such a "hero" or "star" is interchangeable and therefore not vital to his fans. From this perspective, it's an insult to Jesus if we refer to ourselves as his fans. This is because fans see Jesus as nothing more than an interchangeable hero. Jesus might appear valuable enough to his fans to request an autograph from him. Yet, he is not vital to them, for fans do not want to lose their lives for Jesus. To be a fan of Jesus means observing him through a telescope, sympathizing with him, and yet maintaining a distance. Fans are therefore not true professing Christians, and Jesus does not accept them as his disciples.

Ultimately, Jesus does not need fans and rejects them, even if he thereby loses followers and becomes unpopular. In his ministry among people, Jesus therefore placed no value on being at the top of the popularity scale among the crowd. Rather, he deliberately made himself unpopular with his fans who surrounded him in the crowd. He explained to them that they were unfit for his calling, so that they would leave him. From this, it becomes clear: Jesus rejects any fan cult around his person, for he does not want to gain glory from people. He does not seek recognition from people, but God's honor, and thus he does not want to be honored in a human way. He did not come to earth to found a fan club, but to find followers. We should therefore not think that we can replace following Christ by writing about Jesus on Facebook or Instagram, liking him, and declaring ourselves his followers. Thus, we should be aware: Jesus does not want to be popular and famous like a pop star, he disdains fan cheering, and he does not issue autographs. Worldly fame and glamour are repugnant to him, for he represents God's concerns and wants to establish a divine kingdom that is not of this world.

For this, he needs people who want to serve him with heartfelt devotion, dedicate themselves completely to him and his mission, and thus follow him on his selfless path. Therefore, only a **follower** can fulfill the evangelistic mission of being light and salt, which requires true passion. A true follower salts the earth by being a fisher of men. As an ambassador of Christ, he sows the good seed of the Gospel and gathers fruit from it. How important this is becomes clear from the following words of Jesus: "Whoever does not gather with me scatters." This makes it clear: Either we are **for Jesus** and put ourselves in his service, or we are **scatterers** of the good seed of the Gospel. Thus, a scatterer is not necessarily someone who is obviously against Jesus. Whoever does not actively serve Jesus is a scatterer, because he does not gather fruit from the seed of the Gospel with him. From this, it follows: Not only the official enemies of the cross reject Jesus and thwart his sowing, but also his own fan club. His fans belong to the scatterers of his seed, as they do not want to serve his missionary task and do not follow him.

Obedience: A Misunderstood Christian Virtue

Although Jesus exemplified **obedience** by faithfully doing God's will out of love, even unto death, obedience is often not considered a Christian virtue but rather something negative. It's frequently associated with **works of the law**, which Paul condemned among the Galatians. Obedience is thus readily branded as a negative form of legalism, and Christians who, out of grace, are heartily obedient to the commandments are often reviled as foolish Galatians.

The cry is becoming louder that Jesus came to abolish the commandments, so that we may ignore and transgress them due to grace, and that obedience or the keeping of the commandments should be rejected. However, if obedience were something bad, we would have to act contrary to God's will and live in a carnal mindset, which is malicious and, according to Paul, means hostility toward God and leads to damnation. In contrast, a law-abiding, spiritual mindset, according to Paul, brings eternal salvation.

Furthermore, we read countless exhortations from Jesus to acknowledge and do His will, or to keep God's commandments, so that we may satisfy the divine claim to righteousness. And so Jesus said in John 15 that we are His friends if we do what He says. This means that obedience plays an important and positive role in our relationship with God.

Moreover, Scripture states that only those who **do the law** are considered righteous by God. In this respect, a person righteous before God is an obedient person and a doer of the law, and at the same time a believer, for it is said that righteousness comes by faith alone and a righteous person lives by faith. Therefore, in the Sermon on the Mount, it says: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and drive out demons in your name and perform many miracles in your name?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers' (Matt. 7:21-23)."

This also shows that only those who do not disregard God's commandments like the lawless will stand before God. Furthermore, Jesus told the rich young man that no one enters the Kingdom of God who does not adhere to what the Ten Commandments command. When asked what he must do to enter the Kingdom of God, Jesus replied that he should keep the commandments. He then listed the Ten Commandments to him. In doing so, he showed him that being a Christian means conforming to the standard of the law. Afterward, Jesus made it clear to

him that he lacked only one thing for salvation: namely, to accept Jesus as Lord and to follow Jesus, giving up his wealth for that purpose. Thus, Jesus called the rich young man to follow Him, for Jesus would never have taught the commandments as a way of self-salvation. However, Jesus' intention, by means of the commandments, is to show how much righteousness God demands, to show us and the rich young man that we cannot meet this standard without Him.

Jesus, therefore, cannot be in the service of abolishing the commandments, as He neither relativized the law's claim nor declared it void. Jesus is clearly in the service of **fulfilling the law**. Jesus Himself confirmed this. In the Sermon on the Mount, He said that He had not come to abolish God's commandments, but to fulfill them. Paul also said that grace does not abolish the law but upholds it.

Nevertheless, lawless Christians invoke Paul when they say that obedience to God's commandments would contradict grace. They refer to the "works of the law" sharply criticized by Paul, which displeased God, although they seemingly served to fulfill God's law. However, the context of Paul's theology shows: works of the law are not an act of obedience to the law, but an expression of human legalism. In Galatians, it says: "My brothers and sisters, if I myself were advocating circumcision, as some allege, why am I still being persecuted? In that case, the offense of the cross—at which we are saved only by what happened for us—would have been removed." Here it becomes clear: works of the law, which Paul condemned using the example of circumcision, are intended to earn one's own salvation by observing regulations. Obviously, works of the law are done for self-justification and are to be clearly distinguished from **works of faith** that fulfill God's will because they testify to faithfulness to Jesus and acceptance of His Gospel message. Paul was therefore upset about the works of the law of the Galatians because, according to the Gospel, we are justified solely on the basis of faith and thus through the work of Christ.

The Galatians, however, wanted to perform works of the law for their self-justification, to become righteous through their own legalism. In doing so, they turned away from the Gospel message. After all, the demand for circumcision is not part of the Gospel message, which makes faith in the work of Christ the condition for salvation. But legalistic teachers who wanted to entice them to works of the law convinced the Galatians of an unbiblical Gospel message by saying: "To be saved, trusting in Jesus is not enough; observing Jewish legal regulations is necessary." Instead of rejecting this message, the Galatians allowed themselves to be influenced by their teaching. And so the Galatians wanted to convert to Judaism through circumcision. For faith in the work of Christ no longer seemed sufficient for their salvation to the Galatians, after legalistic preachers had called them to circumcision. The Galatians thus wanted to add their own righteousness to the perfect work on the cross, which imputes Christ's righteousness to us. And therefore, they tried to do works out of their human righteousness, their flesh, to complete the work of Jesus, after initially accepting the true Gospel message.

In this context, Paul told the Galatians that they had fallen from grace. The reason for this, according to Paul's words, was that they tried to complete in the flesh (a term for the sinful nature of man) what they had begun in the Spirit through faith in Jesus. The Galatians thus fell away from Jesus because they became convinced that they had to earn their salvation, at least in part, through their own legalism. They saw their own legalism as an important accessory to the work of Jesus, following the motto: "The work of Jesus must be supplemented by human works-righteousness to achieve justification before God." The Bible, however, tells us that we can do nothing for our justification except accept the work of Jesus. Faith in Jesus and His work makes righteous, nothing else, for He has done everything for our salvation and our justification. Whoever thinks he can contribute something to his salvation through works of the law is therefore on the wrong path and a Pharisee who justifies himself on the basis of his own legalism. According to the Gospel, we insult Jesus by doing works of the law, because we thereby rely on our human righteousness instead of on Christ alone. And of course, this leads to hypocrisy. After all, human righteousness is not even enough to do anything good without hypocrisy. This is due to human sinful nature. Since works of the law do not come from faith, and thus do not originate from Christ and His Holy Spirit, they testify to the wickedness of human nature.

Therefore, they displease God. In contrast, Paul told the Corinthians that it is pleasing to God to keep God's commandments. This statement fits wonderfully with the criticism of works of the law when one realizes that God desires **true obedience**, which occurs out of faith and fulfills the command to love, whereas works of the law, as an expression of human legalism, cannot achieve this. Lawless Christians therefore falsely claim that Paul spoke out against keeping the commandments because they confuse human legalism in the form of dead works of the law with works of obedience. Thus, they unjustly label people as legalistic who want to do God's will and obey God's Word like the Sermon on the Mount. In truth, we cannot even call Jesus our Lord if we do not acknowledge God's will. Did not Jesus say: "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

If we want Jesus to be our Lord and thus determine our lives, it is important to do God's will. What does it mean to do God's will? Certainly not to perform works of the law that are not praiseworthy. Moreover, this contradicts God's Word. If works of the law would make us righteous before God, then we could become righteous without Jesus. Then we would not need the gracious work of Jesus. Then Paul, before his life of faith as a persecutor and murderer of Christians, could have said to God: "Am I not a great Pharisee who deserves to enter the kingdom? Look at all the laws I have kept." But from the perspective of faith, Paul himself recognized that he only appeared good outwardly as a Pharisee, and that he is righteous by faith alone. Paul said about his old life as a Pharisee, in essence: "I was once, according to the law, an exemplary Pharisee before I met Jesus, for according to the requirements of the law I was blameless." He then changed his perspective and said, in essence: "After I

learned to appreciate the righteousness of Christ, I considered my former righteousness as a Pharisee to be rubbish." And so we are to understand that Paul in truth had no righteousness before God before his conversion to Jesus, when he fanatically obeyed laws that he, as a Pharisee, considered important, but which missed the law of God. After all, as a persecutor of Christians, he completely failed the command to love, which is what God's law aims for.

All his seemingly exemplary legalism, in which he was zealous, brought him no righteousness valid before God. Only in Jesus did Paul find the only righteousness valid before God. Through Christ, he became zealous for God and no longer zealous in performing Pharisaic legal regulations. He only understood the true meaning of the law after his conversion and recognized that it is spiritual, therefore demands love, and that the stubborn and loveless adherence to fixed regulations therefore cannot bring God's law to fulfillment. In this sense, he pointed out to the Galatians that God's law is perfectly fulfilled through the love of Jesus regarding all commandments, and that God's law leaves nothing to be desired when we fulfill the command to love. And since true faith in Jesus is active in love, we are thus automatically justified by faith in God's moral claim, and are therefore truly righteous, doers of the law. Thus it says that the righteous lives by faith. From faith, therefore, comes from Christ the perfect righteousness that the law demands.

This is explained by the fact that as true believers, we live from the following promise, which is found in Jeremiah 31:31-34: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each brother say to another, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." We read the same promise in Ezekiel 11:19-20: "And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose heart walks after their detestable things, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord."

If we live from the above promise, which says: "I will give them a heart, and will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them; and they will be my people, and I will be their God," then we are indeed obedient out of faith because we have honestly accepted Jesus and live in the New Covenant. In the

New Covenant, as the above Bible passage describes, obedience to God comes from the heart, because we receive a new heart through a "heart transplant." As Jeremiah said, obedience in the New Covenant happens without compulsion and without a memorization of moral rules. For God said: "And I will give you one heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God!" The Bible tells us: God's moral commandments are so important to Him that He wants to write them into our hearts by means of His grace. The result of this is that we are no longer estranged from them, but identify with them. Thus, obedience flows from grace, because through the new heart of the New Covenant, we naturally want to live according to the ordinances. We keep God's law under grace, just as Solomon kept the ordinances of his father because he loved his father (see 1 Kings 3:3: "Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of David his father."). Solomon did not strive to keep David's divine ordinances. He lived in them because he loved his father. He did not see the commandments as a compulsion, for they were written in his heart.

Under grace, then, we don't view God's commandments as a burden, nor do we have to inwardly force ourselves to keep them in a strained way. Rather, under grace, we walk in God's commandments because they are written on our hearts. This means they don't seem like a heavy burden, and we find it easy to respect them. That's why the Bible says that we can keep Jesus' commandments, and they are not even difficult for us (see 1 John 5:3), if we trust in Him. After all, we can rely on the New Covenant promise mentioned above.

So, we should recognize that our inability to keep God's commandments on our own (without God's grace) is not an excuse to disregard them under grace and transgress them at will. For Jesus redeems us not **in** our lawlessness, but **from** it. Grace does not suspend us from the moral responsibility of living a life according to God's will; rather, it brings us into conformity with God's will and thus aims at obedience itself. It's not for nothing that Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law. I have not come to abolish it, but to fulfill it." In Romans 8, Paul wrote, fittingly with Jesus' statement: "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Jesus' Stance on Keeping the Commandments / On Lawlessness

Jesus exemplified what it means to be **obedient**. He showed us by His example that obedience is important, because His obedience enables our salvation. Jesus' obedience was also demonstrated in His keeping of the commandments, and so He said of Himself: "I keep my Father's commandments and abide in his love." He obviously wanted to show the connection between love and keeping the commandments. In this context, He also promised His disciples that they would follow His example and keep His commandments just as He does, if they abide in His love. This means that Jesus' obedience should also characterize us as disciples, for Jesus' uncompromising obedience defined itself in a perfect love that He grants us by faith, and **love and obedience belong together**. Without love, Jesus surely would have lacked the willingness to suffer greatly to redeem us and to do God's will. With Jesus' words "greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends," Jesus even specifically established a relationship between love and obedience, which is manifested in active merciful action.

Furthermore, He entrusted His disciples with the same divine love that moved Him to obedience unto death, by saying: "You are to love one another as I have loved you." So, according to Jesus' words, our Christian mission is to imitate His selfless, love-driven obedience in order to serve God and people. He thus drew attention to the fact that even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve others, and thereby to humble Himself and lay down His life for others. So Jesus said that we must not exalt ourselves to receive a reward in the kingdom of heaven. According to Jesus, only those who humble themselves for others are great and will be exalted by God. For Jesus said: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Just as Jesus allowed Himself to be humbled because He was completely devoted to God's will, so too a disciple of Jesus should be completely devoted to God's will, even if this means walking thorny paths.

For God only exalts those who are willing to make sacrifices for others and thereby humble themselves for others. Jesus has thus called us to follow Him, and following Jesus would not be following Jesus if it did not follow Jesus' obedient way of life. The whole teaching of Jesus consists in crucifying our human self-will through **self-denial** in order to zealously follow Jesus' example, after we have spiritually crucified and lost our natural life for Jesus. For this, our selfish "I-life" must die, because our self-will cannot bow to Jesus' lordship and makes following Jesus impossible. Our self-will, which conflicts with God's will and His commandments, means self-gratification and contradicts the condition of self-denial that Jesus set as a prerequisite for discipleship.

And so Jesus condemned **lawlessness** most sharply. It manifests itself in living contrary to God's will, doing or allowing everything that serves one's own ego instead of God. Jesus warned against lawlessness in many Bible passages, e.g., in the Olivet Discourse, where He spoke of a great deception that leads to lawlessness in the end times. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus emphasized the connection between lawlessness and

lovelessness, saying that lawlessness would increase in the same measure as lovelessness. In many parables, He warned against lawlessness. For example, in the parable of the wheat and the weeds, He said that at Jesus' return, the weeds, which represent the lawless, will be burned. Jesus thus tolerated no piety that ignores God's will, excluded a so-called free will among His chosen and true followers, for His followers cannot contradict His own attitude and teaching.

Jesus Himself never acted out of a "free will"; He said of Himself that He only does what pleases God, or only speaks and does what God's Spirit prompts Him to do, and thus lives in complete dependence on God and possesses no "free" will independent of God. He also did God's will with complete devotion and joy and said of Himself that it is His food to do the will of the Father. According to Jesus, to act contrary to God's will and to live out one's own free self-will means rebellion against God. And conversely, He said that all who do His will are His brothers and sisters. Analogous to Paul's statement "But thanks be to God, that you were **slaves** of sin, but have become **obedient from the heart** to the standard of teaching to which you were committed," Jesus taught that He liberates from the bondage of sin so that we may do His will, thus His grace redeems to obedience and thereby frees from disobedience. He told the Pharisees the parable of the two sons to show that only those who do God's will, and do not just pretend to do God's will, enter the kingdom of heaven. The first son in the parable said yes to his father's will, but did the opposite of the father's will, and the second son initially said no. However, he repented, and so in the end he did his father's will. Jesus ended the parable with the words: "Truly, I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you."

It is clear that Jesus wanted to portray the Pharisees in the first son, who outwardly wanted to make the father believe he would do his will - but in his heart said no to the father's will and was therefore disobedient. The second son represents a sinner who is initially rebellious towards the father's will, but then, thanks to grace, feels repentance for his reluctance towards the father's will, therefore turns back and becomes obedient. The parable shows that grace was given to bring about repentance for sins and conversion to a life according to God's will. Thus, the self-righteous Pharisees had a worse chance of entering the kingdom of heaven than prostitutes and tax collectors, who did not think so arrogantly of themselves as the Pharisees and were therefore more repentant than the Pharisees.

The parable also shows that grace has the power to change the greatest sinner and bring him into conformity with God's will. John cried out: "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance," for grace leads not only to a superficial confession of sin, but to **true repentance**, followed by the fruit of true conversion. Jesus thus connected grace and our salvation with repentance and conversion to a life of obedience. Jesus also warned in the Sermon on the Mount that those who only say "Lord" to Him but do not do His will will be rejected. This criticism is directed at people who believe the Gospel to be true, but in their hearts, like the first son in the

parable, outwardly and hypocritically say yes to Jesus and thus pretend to do God's will, but in truth say no to Jesus and thus no to God's will. These are self-righteous pious Pharisees because they want to gain God's favor through lip service, do not acknowledge God's will, feel no repentance for their sins, and show neither repentance nor fruit worthy of repentance through a true conversion to a life of obedience. This criticism shows that God looks not at the facade, but at the heart, and expects true worship, which, according to Jesus, happens in spirit and truth.

Our worship is worthless if it is only done with the lips and does not come from the heart, as God already said through the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 29:13-14): "And the Lord said: 'Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men: therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hid.'"

Jesus referred to this word from Isaiah when criticizing the Pharisees, addressing their hypocritical handling of God's commandments. In this context, He criticized them for establishing human traditions that served to dissolve the moral law (see Matthew chapter 15 verses 3-9): "God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' But you say that if anyone tells his father or his mother, 'What you would have gained from me is given to God,' he need not honor his father. So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

Jesus thus accused the Pharisees of inciting lawlessness through their man-made traditions. He revealed that their external piety, which was expressed in a feigned obedience, consisted only of hypocritical actions and lip service and was therefore feigned. Moreover, Jesus did not call the Pharisees too law-abiding or too legalistic, but **lawless**, for their ostentatious rule-keeping was merely self-complacency and theatrical performance with the intention of clothing themselves in a mantle of righteousness before men and before God. Their fault was that they clung to their human goodness and ego and were therefore unwilling to admit their own unrighteousness or lawlessness, which they kept hidden behind their "law-abiding" facade.

The false notion that the Pharisees kept the commandments too exemplarily, were too law-abiding, too concerned with keeping the commandments, and took them too seriously, is therefore untenable, even if they studied the law and outwardly seemed interested in the commandments. However, their human self-will was always the only thing that mattered when keeping the commandments, which is why they by no means exemplified a God-pleasing obedience according to God's

commandments. They did not ask about the meaning of the commandments, but only about the letter of the law.

Had the Pharisees not only taken the commandments seriously literally, but also questioned and taken seriously the meaning of the commandments, they would not have been so conceited and stubborn. In the mirror of the law, they would have admitted to themselves that their human unmerciful legalism literally contradicted God's law. Thus, Jesus accused them of keeping God's law only pro forma and condemned their legalistic piety as hypocrisy and true disobedience as follows: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others

Jesus thus taught that the Pharisees completely missed God's commandments. The "Woe" pronounced over the Pharisees' lack of mercy shows us that Jesus did not separate the commandments from love and mercy. Therefore, Jesus was not satisfied with the unmerciful legalism of the Pharisees. He emphasized that all commandments depend on love, summarized all commandments in the command to love, and demanded truly merciful action beyond human legalism. Therefore, He exhorted His disciples to bear fruit by remaining in Him. He was referring to the **fruit of the Spirit**, which consists of mercy, peacefulness, and, in summary, love as the first-named fruit of the Spirit.

Without the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, we can do nothing, according to Jesus. And the fruit of the Spirit does not come from ourselves, but from Jesus. So Jesus compared Himself to a vine and His disciples to branches that bear much fruit on Jesus as a good vine, but without Him, like a branch cut off from the vine, can bear no fruit, are useless, and can do nothing pleasing to God. To emphasize the seriousness of this statement, Jesus added that all who are unfruitful and thus have no love and mercy will go into hellfire. Jesus' exhortation to His disciples, "without me you can do nothing," shows our dependence on Jesus. According to Jesus, all our human works are not commendable and do not deserve the description "good." Thus, human works-righteousness is also doomed to failure. Therefore, without Jesus, we obviously possess not a mustard seed of righteousness and have nothing to show in the way of good works that correspond to God's moral standard.

Now, someone who lives without Jesus might object: "I don't need Jesus, because from God's perspective, I can't be bad at all. I obey many commandments. I've never committed adultery, I haven't murdered my evil boss, I sometimes give alms, I don't bear false witness about my friends, I don't steal a handbag, and thus I'm not a thief. According to God's law, by and large, I do God's will, and so God's commandments justify me, that I am not a bad person and have something to show through my human decency. Even without the love of Jesus, I have righteousness before God and can indeed do a lot of good without Jesus,

and compared to terrible sinners who completely miss the law, I show a lot of mercy."

But couldn't the Pharisees also have said of themselves that they did much good outwardly, were even overly correct in tithing garden herbs? Yet, according to Jesus, they were guilty concerning God's commandments because they detached the commandment of love from all other commandments. And thus, human legalism, which does not happen by the power of Jesus' love, is not obedience to God, but rather a complete failure regarding all the demands of the law. Our human nature is in an indissoluble conflict with God's commandments. And our human, self-righteous attempts to keep the law only lead to seemingly righteous works of the law. According to human standards, we may imagine keeping the Ten Commandments because we can partially adhere to the outward form of the commandments. But God demands more than a decent facade; He wants us to keep the commandments with all our heart, not just according to the outward form.

To clarify this, Jesus explained God's commandments according to their meaning in the Sermon on the Mount. It becomes clear that every compromise with God's commandments, every hidden sin, however small, is worthy of condemnation, because the commandments are to be understood as life principles that are designed for uncompromising mercy. By looking at the commandments from the perspective of His love, and demanding a maximalist fulfillment of the commandments on the basis of His love, it becomes clear: **Without Jesus, we cannot even begin to keep the commandments - not a single one of the Ten Commandments.** Thus, the Sermon on the Mount also proves true the statement that without the fruit of the Spirit and thus without the love of Jesus, we can do nothing, absolutely nothing good. However, Jesus does not point out our human inadequacy to give us the impression that we are hopeless sinners who can do nothing good and inevitably fail regarding God's commandments.

On the contrary, Jesus warned against thinking that He had come to change, relax, or annul the law. Not the law should be adapted to man through grace, but man to the law. Jesus made it clear: His intention for grace is to bring God's commandments to their full measure and redeem us to obedience. This is to happen by Jesus dwelling in us and His inner perfection grasping us inwardly, so that we fulfill God's will according to His mercy. How much we need this mercy becomes particularly clear in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus said: "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Luke wrote analogously: "Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from one who takes your cloak, withhold not your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and from one who takes away your goods, do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

In both these Bible passages, Jesus, in Luke and Matthew, spoke of God placing a demand for perfection on us, which is fulfilled by our thinking and acting with unconditional **mercy**. For a human-centered mercy that only extends to friendly favors, God cannot reward us, according to Jesus' words. Thus, Jesus made it abundantly clear that we cannot obtain salvation without **true mercy**, and that He does not understand mercy as what it means by our human standards. And the preceding verses 27–35 precisely describe the expected mercy that is desired by the Father: loving enemies, doing good to haters, blessing those who curse, praying for enemies, turning the other cheek, wholeheartedly giving a cloak to a thief, giving to those who ask, and so on.

Of ourselves, we do not possess the mercy demanded by Jesus and can never attain it through effort—no matter how much we struggle with human means to keep God's commandments. Yet, Jesus' **mercy**, or His **love**, which is imparted to us by grace, fulfills God's demand for perfection, which is revealed in His commandments. Paul called the love of Jesus the **bond of perfection**, because it fulfills God's demand for unconditional mercy. So we can ONLY be justified before God through **grace**, for the law, which the psalmist David called perfect, requires the inner perfection of Jesus, which is defined in His love. The law, according to Paul, is spiritual, as it places spiritual demands, as the Sermon on the Mount shows us by clarifying that the commandments demand the spiritual love and mercy of Jesus. In view of this truth, we also understand why Paul said: "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." Similarly, we also understand why, according to the Bible, righteousness can come only from Jesus, for righteousness is tied to a **pure heart**. Our unredeemed, sinful heart leaves us unrighteous before God. Thus, we become righteous before God, who looks into our hearts, only when we have our heart circumcised, or have our heart cleansed from sin by grace.

This very truth is what the Sermon on the Mount is meant to convey, demanding the **new heart of the New Covenant** to rightfully fulfill

God's commandments according to God's standard. The Sermon on the Mount is thus entirely in line with the Scripture of Moses, which states: "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."

And the consequence of this is described in the Scripture in Moses in the form of a promise in the following verse: "You will return and obey the voice of the Lord, doing all his commandments that I command you today." This promise, that God wants to change our heart so that we become obedient to Him, is also described in the Old Testament in the following words (see Ezekiel 36:25-27): "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

This promise applies to all who live in the New Covenant. Paul also referred to this promise in Hebrews 8: "God said: 'The time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. For they did not keep my covenant. Therefore, I turned away from them, declares the Lord. But then I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. And it will be completely different: I will write my law in their heart, it shall determine their entire thinking and acting. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No one will then need to teach another, no one will need to say to his brother: "Know the Lord!" For all—from the least to the greatest—will know who I am. I will forgive their guilt and no longer remember their sins.'"

So, according to Paul, it is also a promise of God to personally ensure that we keep His commandments in the New Covenant. From ourselves, i.e., without the divine help of grace, we can never fulfill God's commandments—simply because without grace we naturally have a heart of stone. But thanks to grace, God Himself, as the above promise shows, fulfills the commandments through faith. In Romans 8, Paul wrote that the demands of the law are fulfilled spiritually by divine power. Paul thus taught that God's commandments are fulfillable, because they can be brought to fruition through grace. He explicitly said that grace serves to uphold the law and not to abolish it.

Paul simultaneously understood that without faith, we cannot fulfill the commandments according to the divine standard of righteousness, and no one can be justified by the law. He stated this in the following words: "For all who rely on works of the law [works of human legalism] are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.' Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

According to Paul, those who do not live in harmony with the law are cursed, for they stand unrighteous before God. And these cursed ones are obviously exclusively unbelievers, as believers are declared righteous. Furthermore, Paul pointed out that a righteous person is always a doer of the law. And thus, believers who are righteous before God are not transgressors of the law. Otherwise, Paul would contradict himself. Conversely, those who transgress the law are neither truly believing nor righteous. They obviously do not have God's law in their hearts like the righteous. They do not have a heart that is circumcised by God, and therefore cannot love God. They cannot wholeheartedly fulfill God's commandments, which require love, and all their works of the law are an abomination to God. For with works of the law, we do not achieve the goal of faith, which, according to Jesus, consists of being as perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.

The righteous, on the other hand, have a new, pure heart and are thus circumcised in heart, so that they inwardly agree with God, love God, and obey His voice, as God already promised in Moses. They therefore do not deviate from God's commandments by trusting in Jesus, for they walk in the love of Jesus.

Jesus expressed this by saying: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples." John wrote: "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we know that we are in him. Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. If we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."

In 1 John 5:2 it also states: "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments." In 1 John 5:3 it states: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." In 1 John 2:6 it states: "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."

Further Bible passages prove the connection between love and obedience (see John 14:23). Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." John 14:24 states: "Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. The love for God is perfected in the one who holds to the word of God" (1 John 2:5). Here, "the word of God" refers to the commandments of God. In John 15, Jesus said: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments,

you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

In summary, Jesus concentrated moral responsibility in all His speeches on His divine **love**. He also established a relationship between love and action. He showed by His example that the love of God manifests itself in tangible deeds. He explained that His love was the basis for His obedience unto death. Thus, He established a connection between love and obedience. True obedience for Jesus therefore means more than an external, human-centered legalism. True obedience to God's will, according to Jesus, requires **divine mercy**, because all of God's commandments demand perfect love. In contrast to the Pharisees, He taught that we can please God only through an inward mercy and merciful action. Mercy, according to Jesus, always proves itself in action. Jesus therefore ended the parable of the Good Samaritan with the exhortation to love just as the Good Samaritan did, and He commanded acting according to this love to serve others. Jesus therefore generally taught that the standard of a disciple's righteousness is a **serving love** that motivates us to exalt others and humble ourselves for them. Therefore, He declared that we need an inner perfection to become righteous.

James's View on the Law / Word of God and Grace

The theology of James can be summarized as follows: The **inner righteousness** of a believer, which comes from faith, is outwardly demonstrated in **good works**, which are the fruit of grace. If truly good deeds are lacking in believers, it indicates nominal Christians with a **dead faith**. The good fruit that James preached as proof of a living faith also recalls what Jesus demanded in the Sermon on the Mount regarding **superior righteousness**: for example, perseverance in trials (James 1:2, 1:12), obedience to God's Word (James 1:13, 1:25), impartiality (James 2:1-2:13), works of righteousness (James 2:14-2:26), control over the tongue (James 3:1-3:12), true wisdom (James 3:13-3:18), hatred of pride and worldliness (James 4:1-4:16), humility and submission to God, and the right conduct of believers in the church.

James illustrates through all these examples what God expects from true believers. His aim is to show that not everyone who calls himself a Christian is saved, by exclaiming: "Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is dead?" James thus criticized the belief in a **cheap grace**. To emphasize that God does not condescend to a cheap grace, James held up the **mirror of the law** to believers. He spoke to religious people who did not take their sin seriously, and thus to those who were not doers of the law. He addressed lawless, nominal Christians who did not measure themselves by God's law, or at least did not take the law seriously, or did not acknowledge the law in the radical way Jesus demanded, by separating the commandments from the commandment of love (thus not viewing the law as a whole). He held up the mirror of the law to show them how unrighteous they were despite their faith, which was dead and did not acknowledge God.

So James said: "For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the whole law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the **law of liberty**. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." Here it is shown: God does not separate His commandments from each other, but sees all commandments as a **unity**. The quintessence of this is that we are to be **doers of the Word** and thus doers of all commandments, and cannot compromise with the commandments. For no one can say yes and no to His law. God therefore considers only those righteous who feel guilty about fulfilling His entire law, and thus are doers of the Word. James therefore emphasizes the **commandment of love** as the sum and highest meaning of all commandments, since the individual commandments are nothing more than a concretization of the commandment of love and thus aim at mercy. Therefore: If we keep the **royal and all-encompassing law of liberty**, the law of love, we fulfill all commandments. Thus, as James wrote, we do what is right, because we are doers of the Word.

So James called the commandment of love the **royal law**, because love, as the ultimate goal of all commandments, sits enthroned over the entire law, and the entire law is contained in this commandment. At the same time, this means that we break the entire law if we do not fulfill the commandment of love by breaking one commandment, even if this does not seem obvious to us. For example, whoever slanders someone and spreads untruths against his neighbor cannot claim to have violated only a single one of the 10 Commandments. He has become guilty of the commandment of love as the meaning and purpose of all divine commandments, and thus of all God's commandments, through this sin. For this reason, James exposed our pharisaical, self-satisfied thinking regarding the commandments as follows: "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become **guilty of all of it**." Thus, all who meet the standard of God's love will have nothing to fear at God's judgment, for mercy triumphs over God's judgment. But all others, as

shown above, will be judged by the law of liberty, the commandment of love, for they are not doers of the law and are guilty of the whole law.

Therefore, according to James, the measure of one's own mercy or unmercifulness falls back on oneself on the day of judgment. Here, James's theology is similar to the Sermon on the Mount, according to which we will be judged by the standard with which we measure others, so that all hidden thoughts count before God. So James admonished that God is not satisfied with a pious facade. Therefore, James, like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, made it clear that the deeds of true believers differ from pious duty-fulfillment by **sincerity and true devotion**. Just as Jesus condemned outward piety in the Sermon on the Mount, James condemned praise of God and prayers that do not come sincerely from the heart. He explained that the worship of God is worthless and hypocritical if the attitude of a doer of the Word does not stand behind the devout behavior. James's theology thus emphasizes that it is **self-righteousness** to consider oneself righteous without being a doer of the law.

James's theology thus emphasizes that we are hypocrites if we devoutly do, pray, and do not act accordingly. Thus, according to James, it cannot be that we praise God with an honest heart and at the same time treat our neighbor badly, because all our speaking and acting come from the same source, which is either sweet or bitter. So James said in chapter 3: "From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water."

James's theology thus revolves around the difference between a **dead, pseudo-faith** and a **true, saving faith**. It emphasizes that our belief in the Gospel is not genuine if we do not align with the **Word of God**. Thus, the Word of God is the true test of the authenticity of our faith, because true faith brings about a **new birth from the Word of God**, which plants the Word of God in our hearts and makes us doers of the Word, who are in agreement with God's will. Therefore, James wrote in 1:18: "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth." Furthermore, James referred to the new birth, which plants the Word of God in the heart, by which our souls are saved (see 1:21): "Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." This means that in a true conversion, we receive the Word of God into our innermost being, internalize it, and act accordingly, which leads to our salvation. And this Word of God comes to us in the person of Jesus, and so we are to open our hearts to Him, so that the Word of God can penetrate us to save our souls. For Jesus is the divine realization of the Word of God, and from this Word we are inwardly born anew through grace when we open our hearts to Jesus. Through our spiritual new birth from the living Word of God (which comes to us in the person of Jesus), we are first able to live according to the Word of God,

because God lives in us and brings about a new orientation in us, God Himself internalizes His Word in us, and realizes it in deed.

Peter also explained that the inward incorporation of the Word of God makes us new people who live holy lives by the power of new birth. To this, Peter wrote in 1:22: "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. For 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.' This word is the good news that was preached to you." Peter points out to believers in this passage that through the new birth from the imperishable seed of the Word of God, they are born anew and have a new eternal life, are thereby cleansed, submit to obedience to the truth, and can love. This makes it clear that the inner new birth from the Word of God led to a total turning point in the community.

Grace, through the new birth, even brings about a change so radical that the Bible explains: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation!" (2 Cor 5:17). Conversely, a faith that does not renew us and thus does not lead to the incorporation of the Word of God cannot bear fruit; consequently, it is dead and cannot save us. This is explained by the parable of the sower.

The parable of the sower describes how God's Word, in the form of a seed, is sown on different soils. In this parable, Jesus compared our hearts to soils, upon which the flourishing and fruitfulness of the seed, which is the Word of God, depend. This seed can only flourish if we die to ourselves and deny ourselves for the sake of the Word. James also emphasized this aspect by calling for the putting away of one's own wickedness, thereby dying to oneself, and receiving the Word of God within to become doers of the Word and thereby be justified. And so man is made blessed not by knowledge of the Word alone, but by doing the Word (see James 1:21-25): "But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

Thus, James's theology emphasizes that **doing the Word of God** is an indispensable fruit of faith that characterizes our salvation, and our salvation is realized in the doing of the Word. Thus, James's theology specifically deals with the connection between **genuine faith and obedience**. So it becomes clear from James that true faith brings forth obedience. Whoever says he is a true Christian but does not live according to the Word of God deceives himself. James has a saying that illustrates this self-deception: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and

perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing."

James illustrated with this parable that many wrongly consider themselves saved. Either because they reject the law as a standard and do not honestly examine themselves by God's law, or they completely reject the Word of God, which gives us a clear moral standard binding on all people. The aspect that God's Word is a binding and firm standard is illustrated by comparing the law to a mirror. A mirror is, after all, impartial and truthfully shows the viewer his appearance without embellishment. Thus, according to James, God's law as a mirror shows us how righteous or unrighteous we are in God's eyes when we look into it. So it becomes clear through James's theology that God's commandments are valid for us under grace and are nothing more than an objective guideline that shows our inner appearance in the light of God's righteousness like a mirror. To become righteous, James therefore demands that we measure ourselves by the commandment of love as the essence of the entire law, look into this commandment, bring our inner being into conformity with it, and persevere in it. This also leads to Christian freedom, as the following statement by James shows: "But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." James therefore wanted to emphasize: We experience freedom when we are in agreement with the Word of God, for thereby we reap blessedness. This also shows that we only harm ourselves and can never be blessed if we do not take God's law seriously, do not take it to heart, but reject it out of self-righteousness.

James also explained that a self-righteous handling of God's Word leads to serious sins against our fellow human beings, which result from our pride. He condemned speaking ill of one's brother by saying: "Whoever speaks evil of a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law." James thus explained that through our sins, which result from the rejection of the law, we not only become guilty against our fellow human beings, but also insult the Lawgiver. By doing evil to our fellow human beings contrary to God's legal demands, we elevate ourselves above the righteousness of the Lawgiver and criticize His law. Thereby we become judges over the law. But by what right do we judge the law? If we judge the law, we set ourselves up as the rightful lawgivers and judges who even want to judge God Himself and elevate ourselves above the wisdom of God. This cannot be right, because our human wisdom never corresponds to the truth according to the Bible, in contrast to the wisdom of God. Moreover, only God can enact just laws, because He is perfect, and righteousness can therefore be found only in His law. James therefore wrote that it is not for us to decide what is right and what is not. The right to enact laws and to judge righteousness belongs only to God, or Jesus, who is one with God. So James criticized with the words: "There is only one Lawgiver and Judge" the presumption of judging God's commandments, for thereby we elevate ourselves against God and God's righteousness, which finds expression in the commandment of love, as well as against our neighbors. Whoever, on the

other hand, acknowledges God as the rightful Judge and Lawgiver will not want to judge anyone, will uphold the commandment of love, and will practice love.

And so we can only honor God if we submit ourselves to Him as the rightful Judge and Lawgiver. Therefore James wrote: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks evil against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?" James also wanted to make it clear to us that we misuse and misappropriate the law and turn the meaning of the law into its opposite when we judge the law, for it is meant to judge us by mirroring our innermost being, uncovering our hidden sins, and perfectly penetrating us to the depths of our heart.

In Hebrews 4:12 it says: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Hebrews 4:12. If, on the other hand, we look away from the commandments, we will, conversely, not realize our hidden sins. This will lead to a lack of self-knowledge, and we will become forgetful hearers of the Word of God. If we are forgetful hearers of the Word of God, according to James's parable mentioned above, we are like someone who, out of vanity, blames the mirror for their own dirt on their face. And because of this, they turn away from the mirror and its reflection after a fleeting glance, consequently forgetting their dilapidated appearance and not realizing their dirty face.

Such a person flees from vanity from their own dirty reflection and prefers to walk around dirty rather than humbly acknowledging their dirty reflection and washing off the dirt. This parable is meant to illustrate that by disregarding the commandments, we overlook our inner dirt, therefore do not recognize our need for redemption, and reject grace for cleansing. James therefore urged to acknowledge the law and to look into it to see one's own guilt, confess it, and repent by the power of grace. For this, all who still have unatoned guilt are to do inward repentance and submit themselves to God and His righteousness (see James 4:7-10): "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you. Realize how great your guilt is; be shocked and mourn over it! You should no longer laugh, but weep; your joy should turn to sadness. Humble yourselves before the Lord! Then he will lift you up."

Thus, it should be clear to us that God's Word is authoritative and not a subject for an ethics debate. What is anchored in His Word reflects God's eternal righteousness. James wants to make this clear to show us how vital it is for us to deal with the Word of God rightly. About the effectiveness of His Word, God says through the prophet Isaiah (55:10-11): "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." In Psalm 107:20 we read: "He sent out his word and healed them!" This Word is, of course, Jesus, of whom it is said that He was sent to heal us. Because Christ is the head of the Church, His entire Word has authority for it and must also be taught bindingly (cf. 1 Pet 4:11; Jer 23:28, 31). In Colossians 3:16 it says: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

In Psalm 119:105 it says about the Word of God: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." In Matthew 4:4 it says: "But he answered, 'It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by **every word** that comes from the mouth of God.'"" Elsewhere the Bible is also compared to a refreshing and fertilizing rain (Isaiah 55:10). The Bible is the basis for the Christian's spiritual struggle with temptation and foreign worldviews: "Take... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God!" (Eph 6:17). In Psalm 138:2 it says: "I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your **faithfulness**, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word." In John 1:1 it says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **THE WORD WAS GOD**." Matthew 24:35:

Jesus says: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." 1 Peter 1:24-25: "For 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but **THE WORD OF THE LORD REMAINS FOREVER**.' And this word is the good news that was preached to you." Deuteronomy 4:2: "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you." Deuteronomy 13:1: "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it." Proverbs 30:5-6: "**EVERY WORD OF GOD IS TESTED**; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar." God has given us the Word, which is in itself **THE WHOLE TRUTH** (John 17:17). Thus, everything we need to know can be found in the Bible. Likewise, everything we find in the Bible is true. 2 Timothy 2:15: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 (not 3 Thessalonians 2:1) it says: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us,

you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers." God's Word 'works' in us as true believers because He has indeed put it into our hearts.

In John 8:51 it says: "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." In Psalm 1 we read of the love of a child of God for God's Word. How important this love for God's Word is, which Jesus called truth, becomes even clearer in comparison to 2 Thessalonians 2:10, where we are reminded that people are lost "because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." To be saved is synonymous with the love of the truth, which we encounter in the Word of God and which is the Word of God itself. True believers believe the Word of God and want to be nourished by the Word. They want to be instructed in the Word, want it proclaimed. They want the Word to be explained to them in all its fullness and depth, for the love of God's Word characterizes a person as a Christian.

Jesus' constant admonition: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" also shows that it is our responsibility to hear God's Word and accordingly to keep it, to accept it and to do it. Only if we are willing to obey when reading and hearing God's Word does God's promise apply to us: "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (Isaiah 66:2). For one thing we must know: God's Word is living and powerful. The sharpest two-edged sword is not as sharp as this Word, which penetrates soul and spirit and joints and marrow, and proves to be a judge of our most secret desires and thoughts (Hebrews 4:12).

Paul's Stance on the Law

Paul's attitude towards the commandments is evident from the following Bible verses: "For it is not the hearers of the law [Torah] who are righteous before God, but the **doers of the law** [Torah] who will be justified" (Romans 2:13). "Do we then overthrow the law [Torah] by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, **we uphold the law** [Torah]" (Romans 3:31). "So the law [Torah] is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (Romans 7:12). The relationship between law and grace is shown in the following Bible passages: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do... in order that the **righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us**, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (i.e., the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in me because I no longer walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.) For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For the mind of the flesh is death, but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

Paul taught the **validity of God's commandments**! For example, he wrote: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" (Hebrews 13:4, NET). These Bible passages should suffice to show that Paul taught that **grace fulfills the law within us**, that Paul saw **obedience as a fruit of salvation**, and that he had no anti-law attitude towards God's moral law. Paul emphasized that the fleshly nature of unredeemed humanity, with its fruits like quarrelsomeness or envy, is the reason for our condemnation. Therefore, we can only enter the Kingdom of God if we receive a **spiritual nature from Jesus**, characterized by love and mercy. And this redeemed nature is **law-abiding**. Paul essentially said: "We should allow ourselves to be guided by the natural law of the Spirit, so that we fulfill the commandments in the essence of the Spirit and keep the commandments out of love." Ultimately, Paul thus taught that **Jesus Himself brings God's law to fruition in us** by our trusting in Him and allowing ourselves to be guided by the Spirit of God. Paul saw **lawlessness** as a characteristic of the unredeemed person, who is too sinful in his nature to be able to fulfill God's commandments. And he did not teach that Jesus redeems us *into* lawlessness. He taught the

opposite and emphasized that he is not lawless, because he lives in the **Law of Christ** and fulfills the Law of Christ. To fulfill the Law of Christ, according to Paul, means to **bear one another's burdens**.

Bearing one another's burdens was also commanded by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount through the demand for **unconditional mercy and self-sacrificing love** even towards enemies. To fulfill the moral responsibility of the Sermon on the Mount, which consists of setting aside one's ego for others out of love, means to fulfill the Law of Christ. We fulfill the Law of Christ by denying ourselves, serving one another in love, and this is a perfect demand that does not relativize the Law. Thus, Paul concentrated the Law on its highest point with its demand to love unconditionally, thereby doing justice to the Law of Christ. The demand for love, or the demand to fulfill the Law of Christ, calls us to the responsibility of **imitating Jesus**. So we are also to imitate Jesus' obedience to the Father and keep God's commandments out of Jesus' love. According to Paul, **obedience, love, and grace belong together**.

In Romans 13:9ff., Paul showed that one can keep the law only out of the motivation of **love for God and for fellow human beings**. The motto: "Love and do what you will" is, for Paul, a contradiction in terms. For he said that we have fulfilled all commandments when we love, and even referred to the 10 Commandments in the following verses, so that we see that love is **lived obedience to the Law** with regard to the 10 Commandments of God, and Jesus' love does not replace the 10 Commandments, but fulfills them. According to Paul, Jesus' love is the ultimate goal of every commandment, as he himself wrote. Therefore, he said that Jesus, as personified love, is the ultimate goal of the commandments, serving the believer for righteousness. In this respect, Paul never called for a life according to one's own discretion and did not claim that the Christian is released from all moral demands.

So he said that we are obligated to love, and that even those who do not love Jesus are cursed. Since love and keeping the commandments cannot be separated, it is obvious that, according to Pauline theology, a lawless person is cursed and therefore not under grace (see John, who wrote that someone who does not keep the commandments does not love Jesus and does not know Him). Moreover, he condemned lawlessness or disobedience in the strongest terms.

In the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the term disobedience appears in the so-called catalogue of vices. This is followed by a warning against disobedience to the will of God or the commandments. So Paul wrote: "When God reveals Himself as the judge, everyone will get what they deserve. He will give eternal life in glory and honor to those who earnestly desire it and who persevere in doing good. But God's unforgiving wrath will fall upon those who, out of selfishness, deny God's truth, resist it, and instead obey unrighteousness. Anguish and distress will come upon all who do evil; first upon the Jews, but then also upon all others. But to everyone who does good, God will grant His glory, honor,

and peace, first to the Jews, then also to all others. For before God all people are equal. So whoever disregards God's will and acts against His commandments will lose their life forever, even if they did not know God's written law."

Here Paul explicitly wrote that all who disregard God's will and therefore live lawlessly will be judged. In the Epistle to the Colossians, Paul said that God's wrath comes upon all sons of disobedience and named specific transgressions as examples of disobedience. In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul, right at the beginning of his letter to the Romans (Rom. 1:5) and at the end of the letter (Rom. 16:26), linked obedience and faith with the same words "...to bring about the **obedience of faith** among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name." With this, Paul wanted to emphasize that faith is not a substitute for obedience, but in reality is the only way that leads to a functioning obedience.

So Paul admonished in the Epistle to the Colossians: "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." In the Corinthian letter we read a similar exhortation: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Paul also confirmed the validity of the 10 Commandments with these words, by saying that no thieves and no idolaters enter the Kingdom of God, for the 10 Commandments forbid idolatry and theft. Moreover, Paul included the heart in God's commandments and thus agreed with the radical Torah interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. Thus, he agreed with Jesus and interpreted the commandments similarly to Jesus. Let's take, for example, the prohibition of theft. Jesus extended the commandment against theft by saying that we should not store up treasures, and should even be generous towards our greatest enemy. Similarly, Paul already saw greed as a serious sin. And so Paul said that God does not want alms from a stingy person. Rather, he said that we should give alms according to the principle: It is more blessed to give than to receive, for then our almsgiving comes from the heart.

Since Paul, like the Sermon on the Mount, did not separate the heart from the commandments, it becomes clear: Paul did not reduce the commandments to their external form like a Pharisee, and taught that it is important to do more than outwardly, pharisaically, follow the

commandments according to the literal wording. As one sees in the quote above, not even a slanderer enters the Kingdom of God. Thus, Paul demanded **true heart purity** and said in the Epistle to the Galatians that our fleshly heart condition is already a reason for hell, which goes hand in hand with a sinful and impure heart. Therefore, he wrote that no impure person enters the Kingdom of God (see Eph. 5:5): "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." Consequently, he spoke of God's commandments being **spiritual**, i.e., demanding spiritual fruit, and emphasized the necessity of obedience by writing that only the **doer of the law**, and not the hearer of the law, is justified before God. He also wrote that grace would serve to **uphold God's law** through the love of Jesus and not to abolish it. Thus, he saw obedience to God's moral demands and faith as a unity.

This is also clear in the following passage: "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:22-32).

Paul here, in essence, said in his words what the Ten Commandments say: You shall not lie. You shall not steal. You shall not be in wrath; let alone kill in wrath. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor. You shall honor all people, not just parents. You shall not bear false witness, and free yourself from deceitful desires. The fulfillment of all these demands, however, as he said, should not happen by one's own strength, but by putting on the new self and putting off the old self. Paul also confirmed the demands of the Sermon on the Mount for **love of enemies** and gave the practical instruction to fulfill the perfect morality of the Sermon on the Mount in the obedience of faith.

In Romans 12:9-21, Paul wrote: "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in

harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Paul wrote a similar admonition to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 5:14-24): "And we urge you, brothers and sisters, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless."

Pauline theology thus emphasizes the following aspects: We are to **keep the commandments with all our heart**, and we are to be **unconditionally merciful** following the example of Jesus. An outwardly assumed righteousness is not enough before God. Therefore, Paul said in the Epistle to the Galatians that in Christ no pious works of the law count, but only "**faith working through love**" (Galatians 5:6). In Jesus, therefore, no pseudo-piety counts, but **living faith**, which produces the fruit of good works out of Jesus' love, without which it would be dead (James 2:17). Whoever understands this correctly can easily distinguish good works from faith from the "works of the law" in Romans 3, for good works are characterized by an **inner attitude of mercy**.

Paul also saw good works, which the law commands, as a **fruit of faith**, without which faith is dead. Thus, he wrote in the Epistle to Titus that true believers are also found before God in a state of good works. Paul spoke of the necessity of good works as a fruit of faith in many letters. Paul emphasized that we cannot earn salvation by good works, but are saved for good works. Thus, the meaning of grace according to Titus 2:11-14 is as follows: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

Whoever, on the other hand, claims that Jesus is a free pass for sin, will be met with the answer to Paul's following rhetorical question: "And why not do evil that good may come? — as some slanderously charge us with

saying. Their condemnation is just." For Paul, salvation thus aims at **freedom for obedience**. In Romans 12, he said that we should be zealous for the will of God. It was close to his heart to reveal to people the **power of grace** and to point out that we are called to live in the **discipleship of Jesus**. Thus, he himself set an example as a follower of Jesus. Paul was always ready to give his life for his mission and thus showed that Jesus' values were completely important to him.

Paul: Misconceptions - First Misconception

Paul is accused of having said that grace would justify transgressing the commandments. An example of this is Paul's statement that he **died to the law** to belong to Jesus, or to bear fruit for God. Many therefore say that Christians have died to the law to have the freedom to transgress the law with impunity. But Paul did not say this. To understand what Paul meant when he spoke of being killed to the law, one must look at the context, see Romans 7:1-6: "Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brothers, you also have **died to the law** through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to what held us captive, so that we serve in the **new way of the Spirit** and not in the old way of the written code."

The True Meaning of the Analogy: Death to the Old Self

Although this analogy is clear, most people misunderstand it, for many wrongly identify the converted Christian with the deceased husband, even though the wife gets the second husband, who symbolically represents Jesus. So many say that the parable means that we, as converted Christians, are dead to the law. And therefore, as Christians, we are allowed to murder and steal without the law accusing us, because a dead person can no longer be accused. Some even say, although this deviates entirely from the content of the parable, that the husband in the parable is the law, and thus the wife is initially married to the law through the law. After the law has died, she can take a second husband.

However, if the wife is bound to the husband by the law, then the law cannot be identical to the husband. For Paul clearly meant that there was a legal bond between the wife and the husband, which made the wife a slave to the husband, and he by no means equated the husband with the law. Moreover, the two interpretations mentioned above are absurd because Paul was referring to a real-life situation and clearly stated that he was speaking to those who knew the law. In that time, according to marriage law, a married woman had to stay with her husband, while the husband could leave. So it is quite clear what the parable means, and that the wife represents the Christian before and after conversion.

Now I would like to explain the true meaning of the parable. The first marriage relationship describes the legal situation of an unconverted person who is in relation to their sinful self. The second marriage relationship represents a person whose sinful self has died and therefore enters into a new marriage. The first marriage relationship describes the legal situation of a woman who has entered into a marriage covenant with a man, to whom she is thereby subject. The woman has legally bound herself to the man, for she has entered into a marriage contract with the man, which legally seals her bond to the man. The figurative meaning is: The husband represents the sinful self, the so-called **flesh**, with whom we live as natural human beings. As natural human beings, we are thus bound and unfree for a bond with God or Jesus. Through our unpaid sins, we are legally bound to the inner flesh. We cannot belong to Jesus as long as we live in a relationship with the sinful self. We are legally bound to it as in a marriage covenant that legally binds us to a husband whom we are not allowed to leave.

The Death of the Old Covenant and the New Life in Christ

But now there is a turning point in the parable. The husband dies, and the marriage contract thus becomes null and void. The marriage law sees the woman completely free from the man, as if she had never married him. After all, the husband has not traveled, but is dead. One cannot be in a relationship or married to a dead person. For this reason alone, a marriage contract is always issued only for the living spouse and is valid only until his death. The marriage contract therefore does not provide for a legal bond to the husband beyond death. For the marriage law, the woman's relationship to her former husband has literally died after the husband has died. The woman, after the husband's death, has no legal connection to her former husband; she can now enter a new relationship. The figurative meaning is: When we convert to Jesus and our **sinful self within us dies**, we are no longer legally bound to it and are no longer "married" to it.

After its death, we are legally in the situation of the widow and are allowed to enter into a new relationship with Jesus. It is important to

understand that in this parable, the marriage law, which symbolically represents **God's Law**, remains untouched. Nor is the marriage contract dissolved, for it is not simply torn up or circumvented in any way. Strictly speaking, it simply becomes null and void, so that it can no longer hold the woman liable. The marriage law remains unchanged in this parable. The demand of the marriage law is: Only one relationship is allowed, and so a married woman cannot belong to another man. The analogy of the parable is that God's Law also forbids two relationships, and we can never live connected with Jesus in a sin relationship. Now I would also like to address the further symbolic meaning of the parable. The wife's marriage contract in the first marriage relationship can be compared to our **certificate of debt**. Our certificate of debt legally legitimizes our sin relationship. It binds us to the flesh because it seals our relationship with sin. It shows us that we have said yes to sin on the legal basis of God's Law and that unpaid bills of our sin debt exist. Analogously, the marriage contract legitimizes the wife's marriage covenant. It shows that the woman from the parable said yes to the husband on the legal basis of marriage law. The marriage contract is the husband's legal means to bind his wife to himself. It is the legal basis on which the marriage covenant exists. Likewise, the certificate of debt is the legal basis on which our sin relationship is based. It is the legal indictment that condemns us as sinners and shows that we are in relation to sin. Our certificate of debt uses the sinful flesh to bind us to itself, for legally we are thereby affiliated with it and subject to it. The certificate of debt is thus the legal means of the sinful human being to keep us trapped in a relationship with it. And as long as our sinful human being lives in us, we are at the same time in connection with the indwelling sin of the flesh and cannot stop sinning. This constantly adds new points of accusation to the certificate of debt. In this state, we are **slaves to sin**. Thus, in this state, we cannot belong to Jesus, because we are bound by the relationship to sin and to the sinful human being. Our relationship to sin can only be ended by the death of the sinful human being who compels us to sin. Only its death can rescue us from its power. Analogously, only the death of the husband can end the marriage covenant that chained the wife to the man.

Freedom from Sin Through Christ's Sacrifice

When the sinful person dies by grace, we also die to the relationship to sin that originated from him. The certificate of debt no longer accuses us, for all open bills have been paid by the sacrifice of Jesus and settled with the death of the sinful person. The certificate of debt is null and void through the death of the sinful person. It applied to the sin debt of the sinful person who no longer lives in us after conversion and has left our lives. The guilt that the sinful person caused is, after his death, paid by grace and does not concern us, because we are no longer connected to him in any way and he has completely disappeared from our lives. And God's Law considers our relationship to sin to be truly dead. Furthermore, the parable should make it clear to us: A husband can only

bind his wife to himself until he dies. He can never oblige her to dance to his tune beyond death during his lifetime. Only as long as he lives does he have dominion over her, and the wife must align herself with him. As long as the sinful person lives in us, we are enslaved under his will and his power of sin. But he cannot determine us beyond death. Therefore, as Paul expressed it, we are not debtors to the flesh after a true conversion and belong entirely to Christ.

The quintessence is therefore: To belong to Jesus and to be allowed to live connected with him, we must **die to the sinful person**, so that we stand blameless before God's Law and without a relationship to sin. The analogy from Romans 7 is not to be torn out of the context of Romans 8, which makes the content of the analogy more understandable to us. From Romans 7, following the analogy, it becomes clear how much we are involved in sin and how becoming aware of our wickedness or knowing our guilt through taking note of the Law cannot help us to repent. Paul explained that the reason for this is a sinful inner being, the so-called **flesh**. He explained that this sinful flesh is incorrigible, and that we cannot change or educate the flesh for good, but that it must die so that we are no longer slaves of sin who transgress God's Law. The analogy above builds on this insight and explains with the parable how important it is for us that the sinful person dies, so that we are free from him. For the explanation of the analogy from Romans 7, Paul explains from verse 4 that we are fleshly sold under sin and God's Law is spiritual.

In this chapter, he deals with the incorrigible nature of the flesh. He speaks of the **natural law of sin and death**, which rules in the flesh and tempts us to sin as long as the sinful person lives in us. We cannot suppress this natural law, even if we know God's commandments. But the **death of the sinful person through grace** frees us from the flesh and its indwelling law of sin and death. The consequence of conversion is now described: The sinful person leaves us by dying and is no longer our identity. Jesus takes his place, so that we have a spiritual nature that bears fruit for God. And so Paul wrote about himself that he died to himself or to his sinful person in order to belong to another, so that he might bear fruit for God. Paul became another because Jesus became his life and his new identity. So we are to accept Jesus through conversion, so that our flesh dies, and Jesus lives in us instead of the sinful person. Thereby we are free from the flesh and free from the law of sin and death, which ruled us before conversion and brings us under the natural power of sin. Thus, in the parable, we learn that the wife, after the death of the husband, is free from his law, which is an allusion to the law of sin and death. When Jesus becomes our new life, according to Romans 8, we are not only freed from the natural law of the flesh, but at the same time determined by the **law of the Spirit**. This is a natural law that is precisely the opposite of the law of sin and death, for the Spirit, according to Paul, is subject to God's Law. Thus, as redeemed ones, we are no longer, as exemplarily described in Romans 7, fleshly sold under sin and transgressors of the law, but by the power of grace, we fulfill the Law of God, which is spiritual. And so Paul said in Romans 8 that the

purpose of the killing of the fleshly person is to transform us into people who fulfill God's Law in the essence of the Spirit and thus according to the demand of love in a perfect way.

Here's the translation of the second common misunderstanding regarding Paul's view on the Law:

Second Misconception: "Jesus is the End of the Law"

This misunderstanding is based on a **poor translation** of the following verse: "For Christ is the end of the law—for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4a; Einheitsübersetzung). This Bible quote is frequently used to argue that through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the commandments were "abolished."

However, in truth, this verse should be translated as follows: **"Jesus is the goal of the Law—for righteousness to everyone who believes."**

To verify the accuracy of this statement, here are three alternative translations:

- "For **fulfillment** of the Law is Christ, for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Kurzkommentar zum Neuen Testament, Band 6, Wolfgang Einert, 2003).
- "For the **goal** of the Law is Christ, for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Elberfelder Bibel, 2007).
- "For the **goal toward which the Torah points** is the Messiah, who offers righteousness to everyone who trusts" (The Jewish New Testament, David H. Stern, 2007).

In these three quoted translations, the Greek word "**telos**" (τέλος), which is often translated as "end," is rendered as "fulfillment," "goal," and "the goal toward which the Torah points." "Telos" does not mean annihilation, termination, or cessation, as one might assume, but rather the **goal that is achieved**, or the **completion or conclusion** to which something comes.

Third Misconception: Paul Said Jesus Nailed the Commandments to the Cross

This misunderstanding arises from the following Bible passage: "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

by **canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands**. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:13-14, ESV).

In some Bible translations, Colossians 2:14 is partially translated in a false and misleading way. This is then often wrongly used as proof that Christ "abolished" the Law of God.

In the "Einheitsübersetzung" (a German translation), this verse is completely misleading: "He crossed out the certificate of debt that spoke against us and abolished its demands that accused us. He blotted it out by nailing it to the cross." In contrast, the "Gute Nachricht Bibel" (another German translation) translates this verse very differently: "He declared the certificate of debt, which burdened us because of the unfulfilled legal provisions, invalid. He nailed it to the cross and thereby permanently removed it." Here, it is clearly stated that the **certificate of debt** was removed and declared invalid, **not the Law**. We can assume that it is the certificate of debt, and not the Law of God, that was nailed to the cross.

The point is that Jesus, who were dead through sin, **freed us from sin** and thereby grants us a new, eternal life. This happened by **making the certificate of debt invalid** for us, by paying our sins and thus blotting out the debt of sin. Therefore, it says in the sentence before: "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses" (Colossians 2:13).

What is meant by this is: Jesus was officially executed as a lawbreaker due to our transgressions and violations of the law. This accusation was false. But by taking the death penalty for this false accusation upon himself, he **took our sin debt upon himself** instead, which God could rightly hold against us. He dissolved the accusation that would have meant death for us because of our transgressions of the law, by taking this debt upon himself. By doing this, he enabled **deliverance and the forgiveness of our sins**.

Fourth Misconception: Paul Said Jesus Abolished the Commandments by Breaking Down a Dividing Wall

A commonly misunderstood statement comes from Ephesians 2:14: "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has **broken down**

in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."

Many people disregard the context of this verse and simply claim that this verse states that God's entire Law, including the 10 Commandments, which the Gentiles did not even know, was a wall of hostility between Gentiles and Jews that Jesus allegedly removed. For better understanding, I would like to quote the entire context:

"Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called 'the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has **broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility** by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

Many interpret these verses to mean that the 10 Commandments stood like a wall of hostility between Gentiles and Jews and caused enmity between them. And therefore Jesus abolished the 10 Commandments to make peace. However, it makes little sense in this context to refer the wall of hostility to the 10 Commandments.

"Commandments expressed in ordinances" refer to the **temple service**. Therefore, one should also read the passage in conjunction with the context. For ordinances do not belong to the 10 Commandments, but to the **ceremonial law**, which consisted of many regulations, such as regulations for sacrificial rituals or purity regulations, which were prerequisites for the sacrificial service or for entering the Most Holy Place of the temple. But these regulations led to a **separation of Gentiles and Jews**. For Gentiles were excluded from the temple service because they were not the chosen people. Jews also wanted no contact with Gentiles, for they were considered unclean.

Thus, at the time the Epistle to the Ephesians was written, there was a literal wall that prevented Gentiles from accessing the Most Holy Place of the temple under penalty of death. This wall served to prevent Gentiles from participating in the sacrificial service or from approaching God in the temple. Thus, Gentiles felt like strangers, for they were excluded from communion with God and therefore could not participate in the temple worship. This certainly led to envy of the Jews and to **hostility between Gentiles and Jews**, especially since Jews generally avoided Gentiles as an unclean people and did not want to have fellowship with them. In Jesus, the status of the Gentiles changed.

The sacrificial service, which was based on so many Jewish regulations, was only a **foreshadowing of the better, perfect sacrifice in Jesus**. Therefore, in Jesus, all the laws of the ceremonial law are fulfilled, and Gentiles and Jews are made equal.

The Bible passage does not deal with the dissolution of the moral law, but only with the fact that Jesus' sacrifice makes the **ceremonial law of the Jews**, which led to hostility and excluded Gentiles as strangers from the temple service, unnecessary. The Bible passage is about Jesus taking the Gentiles out of their state of being strangers and not a chosen people, because in Jesus, Jews and Gentiles are made equal, and thus Jesus made peace. Since the 10 Commandments are nothing more than moral legal principles that advocate peaceful coexistence, it is nonsensical to equate the 10 Commandments with the wall of hostility mentioned above, because hostility comes from the disregard of the 10 Commandments and not from the legal principles of the 10 Commandments.

Note: This misunderstanding is supported by suggestive and truly poor Bible translations, for many Bibles translate "commandments expressed in ordinances" simply as "law." In this respect, I understand very well if even learned Bible teachers misinterpret this passage

5.

Misconception: Many Misinterpret the Following Verse

Many misinterpret the following verse: "So the law was our **guardian** until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian" (Galatians 3:24-25).

Many understand this text as if the "guardian" is no longer necessary because, as children of God, we are no longer under the moral responsibility to live as God's commandments demand. They conclude that we can do whatever we please and thus are allowed to sin, or can

escape God's will with impunity. However, the contrast here is not between the validity of the Law and the abolition of the Law, but rather between "**the immature life of slavery under a guardian**" and "**the life of sonship with all its privileges and rights.**" For it is part of the spiritual maturity of a child of God that they are not subject to a guardian who plays the role of a babysitter and is only needed for immature children who cannot manage without supervision.

A "Zuchtmeister" (often translated as "guardian" or "disciplinarian" but literally "trainer" or "tutor") was a legal guardian who also had the authority to discipline. He ensured that immature children did not get lost, took them by the hand, and educated them so that one day they would possess the spiritual maturity to navigate life without a supervisor. The "Zuchtmeister" was thus a kind of babysitter who taught immature children, accompanied them on their paths, and constantly deterred them from doing foolish things through punishment. Therefore, this section is about the **educational value of the Law**, which was meaningful only as long as Jesus, as the living Law, replaced the Law as a guardian by bestowing the spiritual maturity that the Law demands, so that we are mature heirs of God. Just as a "Zuchtmeister" supervised, so God's Law had the function of being a supervisor for the Israelites.

But the New Covenant is based on the promise that God, through the Holy Spirit, grants us spiritual maturity and enables us to walk in His commandments. The Holy Spirit teaches us everything, dwells in us, fulfills the commandments in us, so that out of this spiritual maturity, we do God's will, because Jesus unites us with God and makes us spiritual adults who no longer need a babysitter. Instead, through their spiritual maturity, and without a law threatening punishment, they **keep God's commandments out of a free heart's decision**. This alone makes us eligible for inheritance. Therefore, Paul continued to write: "I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:1-5).

Paul meant to say that there was a time when the people of God were still like immature children (spiritually speaking), and Jesus freed us from this state, so that we are eligible for inheritance by becoming children of God. Children of God have the Spirit of God and are like mature, spiritually mature adults and therefore no longer under a guardian who directs from outside and constantly intervenes from outside. God Himself said that the Old Covenant could only function through compulsion or punishment and still did not achieve the goal of sanctification. But the New Covenant achieves the goal of sanctification, so that in the New Covenant, due to spiritual maturity, we refrain from sin without a "Zuchtmeister" who punishes sin. According to Paul, we are immature as long as we are still

dependent on the powers of the world or have not overcome the world through faith, so as to no longer live worldly, but in the spiritual maturity of a child of God and thus in accordance with God's will.

Misconception: "Everything Is Permitted"

This misconception relates to Paul's statement: "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful."

This verse is often taken out of context and cited as alleged proof that we are allowed to commit any imaginable sin, since God supposedly permits everything for us as Christians. Paul addressed the verse "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful" to the Corinthians, who were concerned about whether they needed to know the origin of all food, and whether they owed it to God to abstain from meat whose origin was unknown. Paul said in 1 Corinthians verse 25 that we are allowed to eat all meat sold in the meat market when invited to a meal. This is true even if the meat might have originally been offered to idols. Paul justified this by stating that as true believers, they would not believe in idols. Thus, they could eat meat of unknown origin because they could not dedicate it to idols anyway. Paul also emphasized that we are allowed to accept all food with thanksgiving in a godly attitude of faith. Paul said in 1 Timothy that God cleanses and sanctifies everything if we receive it with thanksgiving and in faith. This is made clear by the following words: "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."

So, if we eat in faith, then the food is clean, and we don't have to worry about what we eat. It's not so much about the food itself as it is about the **attitude with which we eat**. Thus, Paul granted the Corinthians the freedom to eat any meat set before them. However, Paul limited this freedom with the addition: "But not all things are helpful," to indicate that we should consider the **impact our eating habits can have on others**. Our eating and drinking should be to the glory of God, and with that comes responsibility regarding our eating habits. The question is: Is it good or bad for another person if I eat or don't eat a particular food? Eating meat should not happen if those weak in faith might hear about it and take offense at this eating habit.

Thus, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:23ff.: "'All things are lawful.' Yes, but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful.' Yes, but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor! Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For 'the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof.' If one of the unbelievers invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you, 'This

has been offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience — I do not mean your own conscience, but the other person's. For why should my liberty be determined by someone else's conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of that for which I give thanks? So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved."

Dietary Freedom and Ethical Considerations

We find an interesting addition to this Bible passage in Romans 14, when Paul spoke of us not judging one another because one person eats meat and another eats vegetables. He said: "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself." Furthermore, Paul said that we should not provoke unnecessary conflicts of conscience and disputes by unsettling others about their eating habits, for whoever considers a food to be unclean, for them it is indeed unclean (see Romans 14:14). And if this is the case, then for the sake of their faith, they should not eat that food, for **whatever does not proceed from faith is sin**.

I would like to state my opinion on this matter: According to the Old Testament, there were clean and unclean animals for eating. Meat in the Old Testament was generally allowed only from certain animals, typically ruminants (because they have better digestion). However, these commandments are not the topic of Christian faith, because before the Fall, no meat was eaten at all, and so it should not be our desire to eat meat for the pleasure of its taste. In our luxury society, meat is eaten even though there are good, healthy alternatives.

And surely it is good and healthy not to eat meat, and it is also completely against God's justice and love that we inflict suffering on animals for commercial meat production. And surely the literal killing of animals for profit is also murder according to the Sermon on the Mount. So we should do everything to avoid participating in animal cruelty and increased meat production, even if we are, in principle, allowed to eat meat. After all, Corinthians is not about whether the killing of animals for meat production is right. It is only about whether we are allowed to eat offered meat whose origin is uncertain. Since we indirectly support meat production with the purchase of meat, through which commercial profits (by means of killing animals) are made, there is good reason to live a vegetarian life. Paul certainly would have seen it no differently.

Misunderstanding The Meaning of "Days" in Romans 14:5-6

The passage refers to the words of Paul in Romans 14, verses 5-6: "One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God."

Based on this statement, it might seem to some that Paul is saying the weekday chosen for rest and worship is unimportant. This would imply it doesn't matter which day one chooses, as long as one is "fully convinced in their own mind" and observes the day "to the Lord." Does this mean the Sabbath is no different from any other day? However, to interpret it this way, one must read the Sabbath into the verse, as it is not mentioned anywhere here.

In these verses, simply "days" are mentioned, not the Sabbath or any other God-ordained day of rest and worship.

So, what are these days Paul is referring to here? To find out, we need to look at the context. Paul was writing to a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome.

In verses 2-3, Paul discusses vegetarianism ("the one who is weak eats only vegetables") and continues this theme in verse 6 ("whoever eats... and whoever abstains"). The section in question regarding specific days is found in verses 5 and 6, immediately between the discussions of meat-eating and vegetarianism in verses 2, 3, and 6. There is no biblical connection between Sabbath observance and vegetarianism. Therefore, to assume that Paul was referring to the Sabbath here would require taking these verses out of context. The close connection with eating suggests that Paul has in mind a special day dedicated to fasting or a festive meal. It is evident that Paul was referring to Roman or other special days on which festive eating, fasting, or abstaining from certain foods was practiced.

The context shows us that some members of the congregation there ate meat, while others abstained from it. The vegetarians were likely members who were afraid to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul addresses the issue of eating meat that was probably sacrificed to idols and therefore considered unsuitable for consumption by some members. In that chapter, Paul's view was that any connection of food with idolatry had no influence on whether one was permitted to eat that food. It seems likely that Paul was addressing the same issue in both congregations, namely, whether members should avoid meat associated with idolatry. This may be what Paul meant by his mention of "unclean" meat in Romans 14, verse 14. Instead of using the Greek word that describes foods unclean or forbidden according to the Old Testament, Paul used a word that means "common" or "defiled," which would be appropriate for describing idol meat.

Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 8 was the same as his conclusion in Romans 14, verse 15: Be especially careful not to offend any member, lest they stumble over the issue of meat or even deny their faith. It is clear that the members in Rome did not eat meat because they observed certain days. In no way does this passage refer to the observance of the Sabbath, for God's Sabbath is a "feast" (Leviticus 23:1-3) and not a day on which one must abstain from meat. Romans 14 does not state that "the day" (verse 5) was a recurring weekday (i.e., weekly Sabbath or another weekday). The days mentioned here are therefore obviously related to abstinence from meat, pointing to Roman or other customs and not to God-ordained days of worship.

Misinterpretations of Paul on Sabbath Observance in Colossians

The misunderstanding, which I believe I have thoroughly explained, is that Paul allegedly denigrated the observance of the Sabbath and claimed that by celebrating Sabbaths, the Colossians were returning to weak, worldly elements from which they had died in Jesus.

Paul said to the Colossians: "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on at length about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God." (Colossians 2:16-19). Theologians interpret this misleadingly translated verse "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" differently and are not even agreed on whether the Sabbaths refer to the festival Sabbaths or the weekly Sabbaths.

I want to leave open what the word "Sabbaths" refers to, because either way, this Bible passage does not state that we should not keep the Sabbath. This passage is also the most difficult Bible passage among the misunderstandings of Paul and is often used to explain that the Sabbath and the feasts of God are obsolete (which includes, for example, the Feast of Unleavened Bread). Allegedly, Paul, with this passage, referred to the feasts of Yahweh as a shadow that ends in Jesus and devalued the keeping of the Sabbath or the feasts of Yahweh. However, Paul himself kept the Sabbath. And we can see that Paul was not against celebrating God's feasts simply by the fact that he called on both Jews and Gentiles to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he expected them to keep a feast as the Israelites did; see 1 Cor 5:7-8: "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For

Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." When he spoke of keeping the feast, he was speaking of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, something Jesus himself kept, see Luke 22:1-7-8. Now I want to address the verse in Colossians 2:16.

According to the understanding of modern incorrect translations, Paul wanted to say with this verse: "Do not let anyone make you feel guilty because of food and drink regulations or because of the Sabbath, etc." Most scholars who follow modern Bible translations believe that Paul essentially wanted to say with this verse: "Do not let yourselves be judged for not celebrating the Sabbath, because the Sabbath is just a shadow that points to Jesus and finds its end in Him."

However, Colossians 2:16 is, according to research from the original texts, very misleadingly translated. That is why this Bible passage is so difficult to understand. There are videos on the internet (some of which I have watched for research on this Bible passage) that deal with the fact that verse 16 is poorly to partially incorrectly translated. I have shown that many misunderstandings of Paul arise from incorrect translations. So it should not be surprising if this is also the case with Colossians 2:16. In truth, Paul essentially said: "Let no one judge you concerning food and drink (regulations) **in relation to**, that is, concerning the Sabbaths, New Moons, and Feasts, since all feasts cast a shadow on future things, of which the body of Christ is the substance."

And if this is doubted, I would like to quote from the Elberfelder Bibel: "So let no one judge you concerning food or drink or concerning a feast or new moon or Sabbath, which are a shadow of future things, but the body itself is of Christ." Colossians 2:16-17 - ELB.

Paul thus stated that it is only for the body of Christ to judge about drinking and eating on Sabbaths and God's feasts, as such matters only concern the body of Christ. The little word "only" in Colossians 2:16 was, incidentally, added by the Bible translators or is an invention of the Bible translators, because it does not appear at all in the original text.

By the body of Christ, Christ himself or the Church of Christ is meant. Paul's meaning with this verse was therefore: "Do not let yourselves be judged on how you celebrate your Sabbaths etc." He did not say that they should see the Sabbaths and feasts as a shadow that would have no meaning in Jesus. He did not devalue the feasts, because the word "only" was falsely added. Paul was speaking to Gentiles who had converted. He by no means told them not to keep the Sabbath, because he himself observed the Sabbath - but he warned against false teachers who wanted to tell them HOW to keep these feasts.

Paul, therefore, did not condemn the Colossians for celebrating Sabbaths, feasts, and New Moons. Rather, he condemned those who wanted to make the Colossians feel guilty by imposing food and drink regulations on

their Sabbath or New Moon feasts that God never gave and were therefore worldly. Paul called these regulations "worldly precepts" and warned the Colossians against observing these precepts, because, according to Paul, this would be a relapse into the elements of the world. The core of the Epistle to the Colossians is, therefore, not about the validity of the Sabbaths, feasts of Yahweh, and New Moons, but about the danger of a relapse into "the elements of the world" (Col 2:8, 20).

Paul also addressed this aspect in Galatians 4:3, 9, when he wrote: "How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain." (Gal 4:9-10). What are the "elements of the world"? In antiquity, these initially referred to the four "(primeval) elements" earth, water, air, and fire, but also to the stars and constellations. The latter could be personified and understood as gods or spirits, which led to the idea of astral spirits. These "elements" had to be paid due worship by meticulously observing their laws and regulations. Paul called the relapse into human feast traditions that God had never given a relapse into the "elements of the world."

These feast traditions filled the entire year. Days, weeks, and months were named after their countless deities and had to be observed in their honor. There was, therefore, a danger for the Galatians and the believers in Colossae and elsewhere to fall away again from Yahweh, the Creator and Head of life and His wholesome ordinances, and to relapse into pagan philosophies and feast traditions of the gods. Paul's admonition to the Colossians is directed against this danger. Paul strengthened the Colossians in verses 16-19 to continue to hold fast to what Jesus Christ demonstrated to us and not to allow themselves to be made to feel guilty because they kept the Sabbath and the feasts of the Lord without conforming to human teachings.

If Paul had explained to the Colossians in verse 16 that the Sabbath and the feasts of the Lord no longer had validity, then verses 20-23 would make no sense, because in the following verses he explains that they should merely distance themselves from human teachings regarding the celebration of the Sabbath feasts. In Colossians 2:20-23 we read: "If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh." In verses 20-23, Paul clearly stated that we must not allow ourselves to be judged if we do not observe worldly precepts, because these are part of a human "philosophy" and do not refer to Jesus, especially since the Colossians should not serve the worldly powers, but have died to them in Christ (Col 2:8).

These are human precepts or human ordinances that distract from Christ as the embodied meaning of all divine commandments. Thus, the Colossians may have been attacked by a group that worshipped angels because of their lifestyle. Paul said that the accusations were, however, baseless and explained why the Colossians should not take these accusations seriously. Those who criticized the Colossians for the way they celebrated the feasts referred to (secret) revelations (Col 2:18b). They pronounced taboos – especially in connection with eating. Obviously, the false teachers, for example, called for abstinence from food and self-mortification, although God commanded to be joyful and to eat joyfully and to eat one's fill at His feasts. Paul also essentially said: Self-mortification and fasting may have the appearance of godliness – but this appearance probably did not correspond to reality in those who instructed the Colossians regarding the observance of the Sabbaths and against whom Paul warned the Colossians.

Paul warned against false teachers who were not godly but feigned godliness through false humility. Their teachings were dangerous for the Colossians because they only wanted to lead them away from Jesus. So we read: "Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on at length about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh."

Paul thus informed the Colossians that they should not feel guilty because of human commandments and teachings, so that they would not be deterred from joyfully celebrating their feasts and Sabbaths. They should not allow themselves to be persuaded to celebrate the feast days of Yahweh ascetically because they wanted to impose worldly precepts on them. Moreover, Paul feared that they would fall away from Jesus through the false teachers.

For those who accused them wanted to direct the meaning of the commandments to man-made regulations that contained nonsensical teachings such as "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle!" These false teachers wanted to make them believe: "If you really want to be saved, then you must eat and drink in a certain way that we prescribe to you." Thus, Colossians 2:16 is not related to the question of whether the Sabbath is valid, because the Sabbath commandment and the feasts of the Lord are clearly given by God and are certainly not commandments and teachings of men and thus not meant by the worldly precepts against which Paul warned in relation to the Sabbath or the feasts of Yahweh. Commandments and teachings of men were and still are ordinances of

the Jews (Talmud). For example, the Jewish Talmud contains countless regulations concerning the Sabbath.

For example, it is not allowed to walk further than exactly 1 kilometer on the Sabbath; it is not allowed to light a candle or a fire, nor can a light switch or elevator button be operated; no objects may be carried; writing two letters is forbidden; women are not allowed to sit with men in the synagogue... and much, much more. Jesus therefore warned the Pharisees: "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear" (Luke 11:46). In summary: Paul does not condemn the "feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths." Rather, in the Epistle to the Colossians, he addressed the burdens and rules imposed by humans themselves, because he himself observed the Sabbath and the Jewish feasts and new moons, and therefore also wanted them to be celebrated correctly. New Moons are also a festive occasion and of importance, for the feasts of Yahweh depend on new moons and are God-given feasts and times. Today we see how justified Paul's concerns are.

Many who claim to be Christians follow the commandments and teachings of men, which indeed have an appearance of wisdom, but are actually worthless. Therefore, Paul said that we should obey God, not human teachings, in the following words: "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to the (Jewish) faith as it was in the Mashiah (Christ). For he obeyed Yahweh with his whole being, so that Yahweh could be fully active in him; and you have returned to Yahweh through his service and commission. Yahweh is the head of all rule and authority" (Col 2:8-9).

Paul also criticized in the Epistle to the Galatians that the Galatians were misled by people who wanted to lead them away from Jesus and introduced regulations that were human ordinances, in order to tempt them to fall away from Jesus; see Gal 4:8-11: "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid that my labor with you may have been in vain." [NEÜ] So this criticism is about false idolatry that distracts from Jesus, and in this context, the Colossians are warned not to give themselves over to a false faith.

Warnings in Scripture About Lawless Christianity That Rejects God's Word

Scripture already warns us in the Old Testament against the lie that God accepts us without repentance and turning away from sin. We read: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, for they are deluding you; they speak a vision of their own hearts, and not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise the word of the LORD, "Peace will be to you"; and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, "No evil will come upon you."'" (Jeremiah 23:16-17).

The Bible warns us with these words about an image of God that suggests: "Dear God will surely turn a blind eye and not hold sinners accountable." Here we recognize how relevant this passage is today. Because the statement: "They keep saying to those who despise the word of the LORD, 'Peace will be to you'; and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, 'No evil will come upon you'" – is as relevant as ever. Doesn't that sound like the promises of cheap grace?

Today, many preach that grace creates a God who exercises an unjust grace by bestowing grace at the expense of justice, thereby denying all of holy Scripture. Thus, the following applies to the preachers of cheap

grace: "They are deluding you; for they speak a vision of their own hearts, and not from the mouth of the LORD."

The Gospel and Word of God are distorted by false doctrines, or by the gospel of cheap grace. Representatives of cheap grace teach us the motto: "You can do whatever you want. God will forgive you anyway, and whoever does too much good and thus wants to live according to the commandments is overqualified for the kingdom of God anyway. Sin is not bad. You don't need to turn to a life without sin. Rather, persist in sin. Consider the Word of God as outdated. Do not follow the Word of God like the Sermon on the Mount, but your human, selfish moral concepts, to live according to your own free will. Jesus is a nice guy and therefore makes no demands like denying yourself." Aren't these essentially the sayings of today's grace teachers, who reject the narrow path of the Sermon on the Mount and thus the Word of God, and preach cheap grace based on their feelings? They do not move on the basis of the Word of God, because they prefer to invent ear-tickling fables about an all-reconciling grace of God, rather than letting Jesus utter "hard-hitting" conditions for discipleship. Their speeches sound good to many who despise the Word of God. But whoever thinks they don't need to live by God's standard is mistaken, because as merciful and gracious as God is, He also demands that we turn to Him, for Scripture says that His Word is binding. Therefore, it cannot be the goal of God's grace to calculate with God's goodness from the outset and merely rest comfortably in it.

Scripture therefore repeatedly calls us to abandon our sinful ways or to repent, be it through threats of judgment over our sins, through admonishing words, or through a call to a holy life. Above all, however, through Jesus, His incarnate Word, God calls us to repentance, and this repentance presupposes acknowledging the Word of God and acting accordingly. For it is important that God's people know the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) and allow this word to dwell richly in them (Colossians 3:16).

This fact is hardly recognized today, which should not surprise us, for the Bible contains many warnings against rejecting the teaching of Jesus. We read that many nominal Christians twist and despise the Word of God, especially in the end times, and accordingly are not true followers who, according to Jesus, abide in His Word. The Parable of the Sower also shows that not all believers, but only true disciples, turn to the Word of God and do not reject it. This parable is about the living Word of God, which a sower scatters on different soils, which symbolize our hearts. This Word stands for Jesus, who is the living Word of God. For the seed of the living Word to save us, it needs a heart-soil that receives the seed, and is a fertile good soil for the seed of the Gospel. Thus, Jesus compared the heart-soil of people who cannot receive the Word of God due to their heart's attitude with a rocky, stony, and thorny ground or with the wayside. These are those who close their hearts to the Word of God. Only those who appreciate the Word of God like the Sermon on the Mount, gratefully accept it through faith, and are also willing to suffer for the sake of the Word, belong to the few who are saved according to the

parable. These are those of whom it is said: "As for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). According to this parable, the Word of God should reach us by accepting the Gospel from the deepest heart and holding on to it under all circumstances, to internalize and preserve the Word of God.

Jesus emphasized with the parable that we should not only know the Gospel and believe it mentally, but also listen to it, or understand the meaning of the Gospel. In this context, regarding the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:18-19, He said that the enemy steals the seed of the Gospel from us if we do not understand what God's Word means. This also means: We should not hear from the Word of God what corresponds to our selfish interests and tickles our ears, but sincerely listen to the Gospel message and thus the Word of God by opening our ears to the Gospel message. Jesus emphasized this again by ending the Parable of the Sower with the words "He who has ears, let him hear."

When Jesus said: "He who has ears, let him hear," He meant that we not only need knowledge of the Word of God, but also need to hear the word of the Gospel with open ears, so that we are receptive to the Word of God, and receive and implement it in us. This means that our salvation presupposes that we accept the Word of God and thus the Gospel message unadulterated. And so that we do not ignore this message due to our selfishness, He warned: "He who has ears, let him hear."

We read the same warning in the Sermon on the Mount. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that we build on sand if we do not hear and do the Sermon on the Mount, because the Sermon on the Mount is the Word of God, which contains Jesus' idea of true righteousness. Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." And of course, He meant Himself with the rock on which we should build, to found our lives on it. There can be no other foundation according to Scripture anyway, for it is written: "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Thus, Jesus equated the Word of the Sermon on the Mount with His person and compared the Word of the Sermon on the Mount with a solid foundation that securely supports our lives and does not waver or collapse. The Sermon on the Mount should thus become alive in us and be sown into the heart as the Word of God, by Jesus taking shape in us, which the Parable of the Sower illustrates to us. So we see: The person of Jesus cannot be separated from His Word, like the Sermon on the Mount.

Whoever rejects the Word of God cannot be saved, as the Parable of the Sower shows, even if they believe the Gospel and "accept" it with joy for themselves. Therefore, we should consciously turn to the Word of God, which is the seed of the Gospel, and must not reduce the Gospel message to a human teaching and thereby falsify the Word of God. And to the true

Gospel message that the Word of God teaches us also belongs that we must lose our lives to be saved, and to conceal this teaching has fatal consequences.

In this context, Scripture also warns us that we must not listen to those who distort the Word of God and therefore offer us a false gospel that tickles our ears if we do not want to hear the true word of the true gospel that demands self-denial; see 2 Timothy 4:3-4: "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths."

By accumulating their own teachers who serve up an ear-tickling doctrine of the cross of Christ, lawless Christianity is meant, which has brought forth the doctrine of cheap grace. The gospel message of lawless Christianity about cheap grace tickles carnal ears because it states that we can do whatever we want without having to submit to Jesus as Lord. The doctrine of cheap grace therefore invites us to live out our flesh, and this means lawlessness in practice.

Thus, the gospel of cheap grace suggests that we, as followers of Jesus, can live according to our human self-will, since it only formally refers to the biblical Jesus. And thus, according to the gospel of cheap grace, it is easy to be a disciple of Jesus, because one only has to acquire the label of "Christian." But we are not redeemed to a pseudo-Christian life in Jesus, and so a great temptation to apostasy emanates from the false teachers of cheap grace. Therefore, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, which commands us to complete obedience out of faith, we are warned against wolves in sheep's clothing, whom Jesus called lawless by name. He said about them that they hypocritically call Him "Lord, Lord" and yet will be rejected because they do not do His will.

Scripture thus warns against lawless Christians who appear godly as wolves in sheep's clothing, but despise the word of Jesus and thus the will of God. In the end, they will claim to have recognized Him as Lord when He appears as judge and ruler and they grasp His ruling role. They will point out that they have taken His name in their mouths and feigned pious theatrics, because they want to hide their contempt for Jesus and His word under a pious guise.

Fitting this warning, Paul wrote that many give themselves out as godly, but are in truth dangerous false teachers. He also warned against superficial Christians who lead us astray to a life that does not correspond to God's standard, but is directed against His Word. He even spoke of an end-time deception leading to lawlessness: "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy by the appearing of His coming, the one whose coming is by the working of Satan, with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all unrighteous deception toward those who perish, because they did not

receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). Note: Here it becomes clear: Whoever lives lawlessly obviously belongs to those who do not believe the truth and therefore have pleasure in unrighteousness.

Paul warned in this context against a lawless current emanating from the Antichrist, whom Paul called the "son of lawlessness." Paradoxically, Paul, who warned against lawlessness, is accused of having preached lawlessness as the meaning of grace. This should not surprise us. Scripture warns us in the Epistle of Peter that Paul's writings are difficult to understand and are twisted into false doctrines. Finally, Paul is also unjustly accused today of having preached lawlessness as the meaning of grace. In truth, however, Paul insisted that Jesus does not abolish the law, but upholds it and is the end goal of the law, which according to his statement is to happen through the love of Jesus. In his first letter to Timothy, he wrote: "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered off into vain discussion" (1 Timothy 1:5-6).

Furthermore, we read: "And Jesus answered and said to them: 'See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, "I am the Christ," and they will lead many astray. (...) And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold'" (Matthew 24:4-5, 11-12). Note: Here there is talk of a deception leading to lawlessness. At the same time, it is revealed that lawlessness and lovelessness are one and are not compatible with Christ. This urgent warning against a deception is reminiscent of the warning from Jude, as it probably comes from those who associate with Christians and sneak into congregations or publicly appear as alleged spokespersons for God.

In Jude 1:16-19, we find a warning against a group of people who are connected with the church and yet are scoffers who walk according to their ungodly desires. Finally, he said about them: "These are grumblers, malcontents, following their own sinful desires; they speak arrogantly, flattering people for their own advantage. But you, beloved, remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, 'In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.' It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit." Here it shows that an outward confession of Jesus does not mean being a Christian. Many may pretend to us that they are Christians through their pious appearance, because their lifestyle at first glance resembles that of other Christians. They attend church services to demonstrate their pious lives. But in truth they harm the community and wrongly pass themselves off as Christians. A parable also refers to this fact.

It is about weeds that are mixed among the wheat and grew unnoticed on the same field as the wheat until the day of harvest, because weeds initially look very similar to wheat, but are poisonous. According to the parable, the weeds grow in the midst of the good seed, but are separated from the wheat and burned at harvest time. According to the parable, it stands for the lawless, because Jesus ended the parable with the following words: "Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all who practice lawlessness, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear!" (Matthew 13:40-43).

Jesus equated the weeds with believers, because atheists do not mingle among the Christian people. The weeds, therefore, do not stand for atheists, but for lawless nominal Christians who look like wheat as superficial Christians and like to mingle among the Christian people, but not to be a blessing to others and honor Jesus, but out of religiosity and to cause divisions.

Many divisions in the Church of Christ, therefore, do not happen through visible persecution from the world outside the church. Rather, the greatest danger comes from nominal Christians who sit in the very ranks of the true church of Christ and falsify the doctrine of Christ. These are those who bravely confess Jesus, but do not recognize the lordship of Christ. Whoever does not accept the lordship of Christ wants to live a life under their own direction and therefore hates God's commandments, which command us to submit to God and live according to His will, instead of leading a life under our own direction. In 2 Peter, we read a warning about false teachers who want to lead a dissolute life because they despise all authority or do not want to submit to any authority. Peter called these people blemishes in their own ranks. He said that these dissolute people will be punished by God, as God also cast the angels who rebelled against Him into the deepest darkness. Peter said about these false Christians: They enjoyed enticing to sin, and sin, according to John, is lawlessness. Furthermore, Peter said that they promise a false freedom, while they themselves are slaves of corruption, thereby clearly stating that these false Christians promise a Christian freedom in sin or in lawlessness and thus lead others to apostasy.

In summary: Jesus warned against nominal Christians who, as wolves in sheep's clothing, lead to lawlessness and will ultimately be rejected as lawless because of their rebellion against God's will and Word. Jesus demanded that we do His will, therefore hold fast to the Word of God and live accordingly. Therefore, the following applies: The freedom of expression, yes, so to speak, the detachment from all traditional values, which manifests itself in liberalism towards God's Word, is increasingly becoming the "redeeming message of salvation" that promises heaven on earth and denies the truth of God. The Bible warns against this, see: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from

the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1).

Scripture clearly tells us that ultimately all false teachers who preach a false gospel can be recognized by the fact that they are not willing to preach on the basis of the Word from the Bible and lead others to follow their human theories, for Jesus said that God's Word is the truth, and we become free by knowing the truth. Jesus described Himself as the truth and also as the living Word of God. According to Scripture, Jesus is the living Word of God, which God wants to internalize in us through the Gospel, so that the inner heart attitude agrees with the Word of God and the Word of God dwells alive in the heart. Jesus died on the cross so that God would put His Word in our hearts, so that we would gladly obey it. Accepting the Word of God and denying oneself for it is a condition for salvation, as the Parable of the Sower shows, so that it anchors itself in us and becomes alive. Thus, it is placed in our hearts and thereby brings forth salvation. And this salvation brings forth the fruit of rebirth, so that we hear and believe the Word of God with spiritual ears, because the Holy Spirit testifies to the truthfulness of His Word. Therefore, Jesus said in John 8 that a person born of God believes His words, while other people like the Pharisees could not believe the Word of God.

Any rejection and ignorance of the Word of God therefore means rejecting Jesus as the living Word of God and living in unbelief. If we turn away from the Word of God, we leave the foundation of salvation by faith. For it says that God's Word is the truth of God, which we should believe for salvation, see 2 Timothy 4:4: "and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." And thus all will be judged who do not believe and accept the Word of God as the truth, for they thereby turn away from the righteousness of God and find pleasure in unrighteousness, see 2 Thessalonians 2:12: "so that all who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness might be condemned." The quintessence is: We should earnestly open ourselves to the Word of God, like the Sermon on the Mount, for otherwise we will never come to the knowledge of divine righteousness and truth, which is lived reality in Christ and makes us free. Otherwise, the wrath of God will come upon us. The old prophets already warned against this, see Jeremiah 6:10: "To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ears are uncircumcised; they cannot listen; behold, the word of the LORD is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it. Therefore I am full of the wrath of the LORD; I am weary of holding it in. Pour it out on the children in the street, and on the companies of young men as well; both husband and wife shall be taken, the old and the very aged." So we should understand: Our salvation is fully and entirely founded in the Word of God, which should take shape in us through Jesus. Here we read John 3:3-7: "Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.''" Here it is not about baptismal water, but about the Word of God that gives us new life. We also find this statement confirmed in other

passages of Scripture: Ephesians 5:26: "that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word."

Our entire purity and holiness and salvation depend on accepting the Word of God, for it is the truth and wisdom of God that we should know and that sets us free. This is also evident from the following Bible passages: John 17:17: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." And John 6:63: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." We find Spirit and life in the Word of God and thus in the person of Jesus.

What Does Jesus Mean by the Better Righteousness? The Sermon on the Mount

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus demanded a better righteousness than that of a Pharisee, without which we cannot enter the Kingdom of God and which decides our salvation. Jesus thus showed that for Him, the concept of righteousness goes beyond what the Pharisees achieved, who outwardly possessed great righteousness and were considered the greatest keepers of the law in their time. Nevertheless, He did not intend

to abolish or relativize the Law. Right at the beginning, Jesus warned against thinking that He abolishes the Law in its claim or even minimizes the Law by a single jot.

Now the question arises: How are we to achieve a better righteousness than that of a Pharisee, since the Pharisees were known for meticulously keeping the commandments, and yet their obedience did not correspond to the will of God? Did Jesus criticize the Pharisees because they did not observe the letter of the Law precisely enough and perhaps were not always entirely correct in tithing their garden herbs? Is the better righteousness a better, human righteousness and virtue that we must achieve by our own effort through Jesus' radicalized commandments? Are we thus forced to achieve a better righteousness than that of a Pharisee through strained human efforts?

The answer to all these questions is provided solely by the Gospel. The better righteousness that decides our salvation cannot be a better human righteousness than that of a Pharisee. Jesus ultimately said that only through Him can we find the way to God and become righteous before God. Therefore, the righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount can only come from Jesus. This is also proven by the divine claim of the better righteousness, which is obviously the righteousness of Jesus. This righteousness establishes a revolutionary understanding of the commandments that was completely new. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount shows that Jesus views the commandments of God from a completely different perspective than a Pharisee, based on inner mercy. And the Sermon on the Mount is intended to clarify that the Pharisees' perspective leads to a superficial interpretation of the commandments that falls short.

For this purpose, Jesus addressed some commandments. With the phrase "You have heard," Jesus referred to the Pharisees' understanding of the Law. With the formula "But I say to you," Jesus began to speak about His interpretation of the commandments and thereby extended the commandments from the literal wording to the attitude of the heart. Jesus equated a lustful look with an accomplished act of adultery. Moreover, He even called someone a murderer who degrades his brother through insults. And so Jesus essentially said: "The Pharisees say: If someone commits murder, then he stands before God as a murderer. Whoever does not commit manslaughter and thus has no corpse lying in the basement is therefore not a murderer before God and has thus perfectly fulfilled the commandment 'You shall not murder.' But I say to you: It is enough if you harbor hatred in your heart against a person, then the same offense as murder is fulfilled before God." These words show that Jesus only considers the commandments fulfilled when we obey the commandments beyond the literal wording according to the demand of God's love.

Thus, the Sermon on the Mount shows that without Jesus, we can keep the commandments of God outwardly, but not meaningfully. For example, without Jesus, we can fulfill the commandment "You shall not murder" according to its outward form, but we are nevertheless murderers

according to our inner person and guilty of this commandment. The commandment "You shall not murder," in the light of love, means to respect the lives of others. If the Law forbids murder, it says much more than simply forbidding an act. Behind this commandment is a principle. For I can, without being accused of murder, destroy the lives of many people! The Pharisees reduced this law to actual murder! Whoever kills shall be guilty of judgment! Thus, good and evil are judged more strictly in the light of the Sermon on the Mount than according to the human moral standard of the Pharisees, who boasted of their outward righteousness. Jesus also demanded that we correspond to the desired ideal state of the commandments and condemned not only visible sin, but also the omission of good. Thus, He did not merely demand the omission of certain offenses.

He not only demanded not to steal in a material sense, but to be generous, even to heartily grant everything to enemies. Likewise, He demanded unconditional mercy towards every person, to forgive one's brother, and to renounce retaliation for evil deeds. Jesus emphasized the seriousness of His demands in many statements. For example, He said that someone who lovelessly insults his brother goes to hell. Furthermore, Jesus said that no pious act benefits us if we are not willing to make peace after we have had a dispute. We should therefore not offer our sacrifices before God in a bitter heart. Thus, Jesus condemned evil thoughts and words. He made it clear that even inner transgressions are just as worthy of condemnation as visible offenses. This makes it clear that theft does not only mean stealing money, but can also take place "within the legal framework."

Even so-called honest people are, from the perspective of Jesus' better righteousness, thieves, simply because they limit the commandment to an external rule. Even our limited perspective on God's commandments brings us guilt. Whoever limits the commandment against theft to a formal rule overlooks the fact that even an evil word can violate this commandment and steal quality of life. For Jesus, theft also means an inner attitude of greed. Just as Paul called greed idolatry and a hell-worthy betrayal of Jesus, Jesus condemned greed as condemnable theft. Thus, Jesus made it clear that our present pursuit of profit has become legal theft, which God does not tolerate. Any enrichment at the expense of others, which serves one's own luxury and abundance, is disguised theft. Even our excessive pursuit of wealth means theft.

We become thieves by collecting treasures on earth that gather dust and are eaten by moths. In contrast, Jesus called us to regard His better righteousness as a precious pearl worth giving up everything for. Thus, Jesus added to the commandment: "You shall not steal" with the words: "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Furthermore, Jesus directly warned against greed by saying: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and

love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

The better righteousness thus brings the commandments to their full measure, which is founded in their maximalist claim to righteousness. In contrast, there is the legal morality of the Pharisees, who obviously thought inwardly, "Let us look out for the limits of what is permissible, so as not to do more good than the law prescribes or is necessary for the sake of duty. The main thing is that the commandments are fulfilled according to the outward form." The Pharisees outwardly played the righteous, but they moved as close as possible to the limits of what was permissible due to their lack of mercy. They regarded the commandments as a heap of paragraphs that set a legal framework. And so they thought they were righteous as long as they did not visibly break this framework, even if their hearts were directed against the meaning of the commandments. Thus, they thought they did not murder, although, according to Jesus' words, they had a heart like a den of murderers.

They perverted the Law of God by applying the commandments without love, while hiding their own sins behind their outward legality and not taking them seriously. Thus, they felt obliged to the commandments, but considered them fulfilled by "observing" them in a minimalistic sense for the outward form. This minimalistic attitude towards the commandments contrasts with Jesus' perspective, which judges the commandments as an open road for righteousness. In the light of this teaching of Christ, every commandment reveals its full meaning as a requirement of love, and all commandments unite in the greatest commandment: "Love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself."

Thus, all commandments are subject to the commandment of love, and therefore even invisible sins, like evil thoughts, are a violation of God's commandments. That is why a human righteousness is not enough to fulfill God's commandments according to the divine will. An unmerciful, human legalistic morality can indeed lead us to fulfill a duty and obey certain norms. However, our morality then moves only in a minimal area and stops at the letter of the law, if it is even sufficient to adhere to the letter of the law. The Sermon on the Mount shows us this truth and thus reveals that without Jesus there is no righteousness in us, even if we outwardly "fulfill" the Law. It shows: God does not accept our own "righteousness" or our Pharisaical righteous "actions."

God's standard thus corresponds to the Sermon on the Mount and its commanded mercy, which gives us foresight for God's commandments. To please God and live the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus commanded, it is therefore necessary to put on the mercy and love of Jesus; see Colossians: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate

hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

Salvation in Jesus is therefore connected with the garment of Jesus' perfection: "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10). This means, conversely, that no one with an impure heart can stand, and therefore no lawless person enters the kingdom of God (see also Ephesians 5:5): "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." The Sermon on the Mount clarifies the following biblical truths: "For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. So then each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10b, 12). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Corinthians 5:10). "Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God" (1 Corinthians 4:5). "...on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Romans 2:16). "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart..." (Hebrews 4:12).

Here we recognize the reference to the Beatitude "Blessed are the pure in heart." How important a pure heart is, is evident from the importance of the commandment of love. Paul wrote: "If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed" (1 Corinthians 16:22). James wrote that we will all be judged by the law of liberty, or the law of love, if we have shown no mercy. James said: "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13). Therefore, every faith is dead and useless that does not bring about an inner purity of heart, which is shown in Jesus' perfect love for our fellow human beings and God.

Deeper Understanding and Summary of the Sermon on the Mount

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus showed that God judges us morally according to His commandments. And God makes no distinction whether our words aim at murder or whether we physically murder, whether we rob someone or merely intend to deprive someone of their honor out of a sense of duty. Thus, without Jesus, we are all evildoers and obvious lawbreakers, just like the Pharisees, who only distinguished themselves outwardly by a clean slate.

Even as the most decent citizens on earth, without Jesus, we stand on the same level as murderers and thieves. But Jesus does not want us to stop at this realization, despair at our own inaccessibility, or shrug our shoulders and say, "What's the point? Then God will have to turn a blind eye out of grace." Jesus drew the line to Himself as the personified grace of God, by saying that He does not abolish God's claim but fulfills it. After reading the Sermon on the Mount, it is obvious that we are to surpass the Pharisees in their righteousness, by Jesus writing the commandments into our hearts through His love. This leads us to want to do more than outwardly keep the commandments like the Pharisees, who liked to complicate the Law into confusing rules.

Jesus accused them of imposing unnecessary burdens on the people through human ordinances. Jesus told them: "You act as if man were made for the law; in truth, it is the other way around." The Law should, therefore, never make life difficult for people, but serve the well-being of fellow human beings. Otherwise, God's Law would only be a collection of rules that we perform for the sake of the law. But Jesus said that the commandments aim at love. And when we understand that the commandments demand selfless love for God and our fellow human beings, the following statement of Jesus becomes understandable: "The Law is for man, and not man for the Law." Out of love, we fulfill the commandments of God not like the Pharisees for the sake of the rule, but for the sake of people, and are thus wholeheartedly obedient to the will of God. An example of such obedience based on the principle of love is given by the Good Samaritan, who was so moved by compassion for a helpless person lying on the ground that he was willing to do everything for him. He did not ask: "Is it not okay to leave? What do God's commandments say about it? Can I leave him lying there without fearing the punishment of the law, since I myself do not commit active murder if this helpless person dies? Is there a paragraph that now obliges me to help a person lying on the ground?" No, for mercy's sake, he helped him, without compromise and thus selflessly. Thus he fulfilled the Law of God, which aims at love. So we should understand that Jesus does not want to loosen or weaken the Law, but to engrave it in our hearts, so that the commandments grip us from within and no longer stand before us as dead rules. This allows us to follow the example of the Good Samaritan, and wholeheartedly keep the commandments thanks to inner conviction.

The purpose of the Sermon on the Mount, therefore, is not to overwhelm us with rules, because Jesus only wants to clarify the true meaning of the commandments through His Torah exposition. Through case studies, the Sermon on the Mount is intended to show us that we should not only keep the commandments superficially, but from the heart. To illustrate this, Jesus extended the commandments from their literal wording to their full meaning, by including the heart in the commandments. This is expressed by the antitheses, because with the phrase "You have heard," Jesus addressed the narrow-minded, formal understanding of the law by the Pharisees, and with the phrase "But I say to you," Jesus extended the literal interpretation of the commandments from the wording to the true meaning and thus to the maximum demand of His unconditional love. This

makes it clear that righteousness before God means more than a superficially clean facade and that loveless formalities fall short. Thus, the Pharisees were guilty of a total failure regarding the commandments, as they reduced the commandments in their loveless view to formal rules and norms.

With their outwardly clean slate, they tried to cover up their mercilessness. Jesus reproached them for feigning righteousness and said the following about the Pharisees: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean." (Matthew 23:23-26).

With the statement "First clean the inside of your cup, instead of just polishing the outside, then the outside will also be clean," Jesus pinpointed the problem of our human righteousness by works. If we try to become righteous outwardly with our unclean hearts through superficial actions, we can only act "good" in a Pharisaical sense.

Since our heart is unclean without Jesus, our own righteousness by works does not extend beyond the pure slate of a Pharisee. This means: Whoever is unclean inside will neither want to do good nor be able to do good and can display nothing more than a Pharisaical outward decorum. If, despite inner impurity, we try to become righteous by works, this is therefore an abomination to God. For all our human "decorum" is in God's eyes no more than a cup polished from the outside with an inedible content. Without the heart of the New Covenant, even as "do-gooders," we are like whitewashed tombs, which have a beautiful coat of paint, but are in truth full of dead bones and filth. For this reason, Jesus exhorted us in the Sermon on the Mount that we can only stand before God with His inner perfection, for the heart is the control center of all our inner motives, thoughts, and the origin of our actions. And thus our works are the fruit of our heart and testify to our identity as sinners in the unredeemed state.

Conversely, this means that true Christians testify to Jesus and His divine identity and are recognizable by the fruit of good deeds. Disciples of Jesus are characterized by the fruit of the Spirit, which includes love and mercy. Since love is the ultimate goal of all commandments, a true obedience flows from the love of Jesus, which fulfills the will of God better than the hypocritical "obedience" of the Pharisees. This true obedience thus characterizes our salvation, so that we wholeheartedly act according to God's commandments instead of merely for outward show like the Pharisees.

The Sermon on the Mount thus shows that our actions should be determined by our motivations and heart attitudes, and not by "how something looks outwardly." And so Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, does not demand a purely external "correction" of our behavior, but to lay the axe to the root cause of all our wickedness, by eliminating sin from within. The seriousness of this demand is shown by Jesus' statement that it is better to tear out an eye that leads to sin than to go to hell with such an eye that leads to sin.

This is to make us understand: Sin should not be outwardly minimized, but it should be radically uprooted, root and all. This should happen by letting Jesus tear out the human heart as the source, origin, and ground of all our sin and condemnation. Every hidden sin, no matter how small, that lies in our human nature, should be eradicated. The message of the Sermon on the Mount is: Everything will be revealed before the judgment seat of God.

Thus, the following verse in 1 Corinthians 4:5 is proved true: "...who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart..." In Matthew 12:37, Jesus said, analogous to this passage: "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

In this sense, no human legality justifies us, but only the heart of the New Covenant, which frees us from blasphemies, evil thoughts, and every inner sin, and at the same time makes us truly merciful. The Sermon on the Mount thus places the commandments in the light of Christ, to rip the spectacles of a self-righteous, self-sufficient Pharisee from our eyes. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount distinguishes between appearance and reality. It shows that God hates superficially good deeds as well as intentionally feigned good deeds. Therefore, Jesus said: "Whoever is pure inside, is also pure outwardly." The reverse does not work. Whoever wants to stand clean before God outwardly, must also be clean inwardly. And so the Sermon on the Mount condemns the Pharisees, who were considered the superheroes regarding the commandments and played the role of clean-cut individuals. It reveals that their legalism means nothing more than total failure to the Law of God. The Sermon on the Mount thus shows us that a clean facade is useless, because only those who recognize the perfect righteousness of Jesus as their sole goal in life and yearn for it can inherit the Kingdom of God; to do God's will at any cost and without compromise, because the love of Jesus inwardly prevails in their hearts. And since all the commandments of God have the perfect love of God as their goal, there are no loopholes in the law, or no legal gaps that allow us to sin or transgress God's will. Thus, God considers His commandments fulfilled only when we keep them according to their meaning by walking in the love of Jesus.

False Teachings About the Sermon on the Mount

Heresy Number 1: The Sermon on the Mount Leads to Legalism

According to some, the Sermon on the Mount implies that we should fulfill God's commandments better than the Pharisees, thus being more obedient than them. Adherents of **cheap grace** argue that the Sermon on the Mount, in practice, would lead to **legalism** because they associate obedience with human legalism and the resulting works of the law. This is absurd, however, because we must not confuse obedience with human legalism and the works of the law that stem from it. The Pharisees did not practice obedience, but rather works of the law. And so, adherents of cheap grace absurdly claim that the Pharisees kept the law impeccably and were precisely for that reason unjust before God.

Jesus, on the other hand, said to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:28: "In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

From this, it becomes clear that the Pharisees were lawless and therefore unjust before God. The Bible specifically shows that the Pharisees could never enter the Kingdom of Heaven because they disregarded the commandments. And the Sermon on the Mount expresses how they disregarded the commandments. Jesus showed in the Sermon on the Mount that the quality of their obedience to the law was insufficient. God desires a completely different form and quality of obedience from us than the "obedience" the Pharisees displayed. Their so-called obedience to the law consisted of **legalism**, where mercy is suffocated by strict adherence to rules. In contrast, the commandments are to be understood as principles for merciful thought and action, all of which describe the commandment of love. In this sense, Paul in all his statements agreed with the Sermon on the Mount. Paul himself judged the commandments

spiritually and thus according to their true meaning, or according to the standard of divine love. And so I ask: Don't we hear Jesus' words: "Anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'You fool!' is answerable to the fires of hell," when Paul said that no slanderers will inherit the kingdom of God? This alone proves that Paul set God's commandments just as absolutely as Jesus, and his criticism of works of the law does not contradict this. Works of the law, after all, only concern a formal fulfillment of the commandments, not genuine obedience. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount by no means leads to legalism. Nor does it add new rules to God's commandments. Instead, it illustrates, using case examples from Jesus' interpretation of the Torah, that the Pharisees flattened the law.

As a result, the commandments appear "sharpened" in the Sermon on the Mount. Many with an anti-monistic viewpoint say that this apparent sharpening of the commandments serves to prove their impossibility of fulfillment. However, it is obvious that Jesus by no means presents His view of the Torah as a glorified ideal. It is obvious that He genuinely wants to correct the commandments in their truthfulness and thus declares the commandments binding according to His own strict standard.

So, the Sermon on the Mount is solely about a true explanation of the meaning of the commandments, their truthfulness, and their significance, and not about intentionally sharpening them. At the same time, the Sermon on the Mount points us to Jesus' **mercy** as the meaning, purpose, and goal of all commandments. The Sermon on the Mount thus does not contain simple moral rules that can be fulfilled through legalism. It contains the demand to become truly righteous by going beyond the formal understanding of the law held by the Pharisees and keeping God's commandments according to God's will. The Sermon on the Mount is therefore not about mere formalism, because formalism exhausts itself in following external rules. But the righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount is about a perfect, inwardly originating, and true righteousness that breaks through all formalism. The Sermon on the Mount suggests to us a **divine righteousness** that lives up to the "sharpened" meaning of the commandments. And it is clear from the outset that this righteousness is to come from Jesus. The righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount thus promises us salvation because it is a **gift of grace**. It belongs not to those who want to become righteous out of legalism, but to those who have accepted Jesus and His grace. This is anticipated by the **Beatitudes**. They are addressed to people who possess the divine character traits of Jesus. These are people who make peace, are merciful, hunger for righteousness, etc. Such people are strong in character and selfless, thereby separating themselves from the world to be light and salt.

Understanding Righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount

Clearly, the Beatitudes already show that the expected **greater righteousness** must emanate from a **pure heart** and can therefore only be a **gift of faith**. The Sermon on the Mount therefore unequivocally deals with the **righteousness of faith** of a true disciple, for it demands nothing less than a **new being in Jesus**. It describes the resulting righteous characteristics of a disciple, which are realized through divinely merciful actions. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount is not to be fulfilled by our own doing, but by our **trust in Christ**. The greater righteousness is therefore also not to be realized by clinging to rules. This would be doomed to failure anyway. Due to its divine sublimity over all human legalism, it can never be realized by a rigid adherence to commandments. To assume otherwise is absurd. Ultimately, it is founded on an **inner perfection** that can only be found in Christ. This better righteousness therefore does not result from human efforts to keep God's law. After all, it is a **God-like righteousness** that comes **solely from faith**. And thus, the Sermon on the Mount is achievable and not a utopian demand for righteousness, as it is meant to come into effect through the person of Jesus.

The Sermon on the Mount: A Promise, Not a Command

Clearly, the Sermon on the Mount is only to be understood in relation to the **Sermonizer**, for it is not a self-help guide for perfect righteousness that serves self-sanctification. Rather, the righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount is bound to **grace**, to **Christ**, and to **His perfection**, which is why Jesus indeed makes it a condition of true discipleship and it speaks to us as believers. We are to regard its radical demands as **promises of faith**. Therefore, we should not see demanding commandments in the Sermon on the Mount, as it is a **promise of faith**. This is already shown by the language of the Sermon on the Mount, as it does not impose commandments on us in an imperative form. For example, the Sermon on the Mount does not tell us in an imperative form: "Become a light. Become salt and strive to do good to become righteous." Rather, the Sermon on the Mount conveys the following message in the imperative to those who are inwardly pure through grace: "You **are** the light of the world. You **are** the salt of the earth. Let your light shine through your works." This means: It is not our task to become a light by frantically trying to do good works. We are to **be** light from our transformed being in Jesus. We are to let our light, which comes from Jesus, shine in our works. From ourselves, we cannot do good works that testify to the light of God,

as without Jesus we do not even have a divine spark of light within us and walk in darkness. So we are not to become a light by trying to become better than the Pharisees through human efforts. Therefore, we should not try to fulfill the Sermon on the Mount by our own strength in order to become righteous.

We should instead embrace **Jesus as the living Sermon on the Mount**, so that it might be realized in us. In Him, we have the radical righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount. So, we are to live out what we are in Jesus, namely **light and flavorful salt**. By doing so, we are to surpass the Pharisees' so-called righteousness by light-years. In summary, the righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount can never come from us and must be grasped by faith. This is evident from the characterizations of the better righteousness expressed in the Beatitudes, for they show us how we qualify as light and salt of the earth. They show us that our light and salt identity is bound to the **divine character traits of Jesus**. The Sermon on the Mount thus characterizes the heavenly righteousness that makes us salty, flavorful bearers of light. It is directed at those who strive for heavenly righteousness and thus thirst for Jesus Himself. In this sense, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount called for seeking the righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven, which He also embodies. All of this shows that the Sermon on the Mount is a pure **Gospel sermon**. To illustrate this, Jesus addresses the first Beatitude to those who consider themselves **poor in spirit** before God. They know and feel their need for redemption, for the Gospel is to be preached to the "poor."

It is not revealed to the spiritually proud, who claim to be rich and in need of nothing, but to the humble. Jesus stated definitively: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven." To them is promised: "You are the salt of the earth, the light of the world." It is perfectly obvious that this is a Gospel message, for we cannot be light and salt without Jesus. The affirmation: "You are the salt and light," is meant to show our natural state as true followers of Christ. True, pure salt seasons because it is inherently flavorful, and light shines because light is naturally bright. It is the same with us. When we have put on the righteousness of Jesus, we are flavorful and a light of the world because this corresponds to the nature of Jesus. Jesus, therefore, essentially said: If you, as My disciples, are not flavorful, then it is as strange as flavorful salt not seasoning.

And thus Jesus made it clear: We cannot be powerless as true disciples, because He, as the bright light of the world and flavorful salt of the earth, dwells in us. For it is a law of nature that salt seasons and light shines. The righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount makes us flavorful through the power of grace. It also makes us a light, and thereby we automatically become followers of Jesus. Finally, Jesus said that we walk in His light as long as we cleave to and follow Him as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. According to Paul, the light of Christ produces in us goodness, righteousness, and truth, fitting the blessed qualities of a true disciple who follows Jesus out of a love for righteousness. Thus, the

Pharisees were in darkness, for they lacked goodness. According to the Bible, they were deceitful. Therefore, they obviously could not see the law of God with the eyes of a better righteousness. Although they superficially observed many God-given commandments, they fulfilled the commandments only in a legalistic sense. In legalism, the will of God definitely does not count, but rules do.

In legalism, the moral commandments of God are reduced to formal rules to achieve a minimum of "righteousness." Thus, keeping rules in legalism may serve to observe moral boundaries. However, this cannot achieve true righteousness because it is only about minimalism. In legalism, specifically, it's about fixing the boundary of a prohibition or commandment precisely at a legally defined rule. This leads to the motto: up to here and no further does the commandment apply. In this way, the demand for love and mercy is struck out of the commandments. The Sermon on the Mount is directed against such a superficial and minimalistic interpretation of the commandments.

It tells us that our moral thinking should not run into any legalistic boundary, because every commandment is spiritually violated without the love and mercy of Jesus. The **better righteousness** of the Sermon on the Mount therefore by no means consists of a greater amount of human legalism compared to the Pharisees, through an even more meticulous observance of meaningless rules like tithing herbs. The better righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount fulfills every single commandment in its entire meaning completely and perfectly, and thus with all our heart. It even fulfills every jot of the law and thus all demands of the law in a God-pleasing way. This is not about a quantitatively "high-quality" fulfillment of the law, but about a maximalist fulfillment of the entire moral law. In other words: The better righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount fully does justice to God's commandments and fulfills them in a maximalist way. At the same time, it avoids a hard-hearted and rule-based legalism that aims at observing many rules in a quantitative sense.

The difference between the demanded better righteousness and legalism becomes clear through the characteristics of better righteousness. It is characterized by **sincerity**. It is connected with a true **thirst for righteousness**. It manifests in an uncompromising and selfless goodness and love for God and our fellow human beings. The better righteousness thus stands in contrast to Pharisaic legalism for the following reasons:

In Pharisaic legalism, certain rules count that completely miss the point of the commandments and at best fulfill the letter of the law. In legalism, rules are placed above a relationship with God. In legalism, not righteousness, but the outward form of the commandments matters. So, Pharisaic legalism is about appearance, not being. For example, the Pharisees tried to feign righteousness through their legalism. Tithing kitchen herbs is an example of this. By tithing kitchen herbs, they wanted to show outwardly that they would gladly sacrifice money. However, we learn from the Bible that the Pharisees were greedy. Out of hypocrisy, they nevertheless gave the tenth part of their yield of kitchen herbs,

which cost them practically nothing. And so, tithing kitchen herbs served their showing off. Their legalism thus served a clean facade. To polish their facade, the Pharisees derived human commandments from God's commandments, which they pedantically observed and served no moral purpose. The better righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount is not about outward appearance, but about **truthfulness**. It therefore does not aim at human commandments that regulate moral behavior. It does not rigidly adhere to the letter of the law, because it specifically asks about the **divine will**.

It asks about the perfect will of God behind the letter of the law, in order to fulfill the law of God completely and in a maximalist way. The better righteousness is thus not about a righteous appearance, but about righteous being. And it manifests in a true and perfect obedience conditioned by love, which is not appearance, but being. So we should understand: It is important to fulfill God's commandments in such a way that the moral demand for love is fulfilled. That is why we need the better righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount. The better righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount is ultimately defined by the unconditional love of Jesus, which even includes one's own enemy. To hear and do the words of the Sermon on the Mount, therefore, means nothing less than to walk in the love of Jesus and in His commandments. To do the Sermon on the Mount and thus fulfill God's demand for righteousness, we therefore need a new, loving heart. At the same time, it is necessary to lose our sinful heart, for our inner sins make us Pharisees, lawless, and evildoers. The Word of God tells us: Not only our visible deeds, but also our human heart in its unredeemed state makes us lawless. John wrote: "Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him." And so, we obviously have no right to eternal life without Jesus, for hatred defines our human being in the unredeemed state. If brotherly hatred makes us murderers and unrighteous, then the love of Jesus makes us righteous.

For the love of Jesus is the greatest contrast to the hatred of human nature. Jesus wanted to illustrate this aspect through His interpretation of the Torah. In doing so, He intended to show us that without Him, we are guilty even of the seemingly "grossest" commandment, which states: "You shall not murder." And He addressed this commandment first in His interpretation of the Torah, to show us that without Him we cannot demonstrate even a spark of righteousness and stand under the accusation of the law just like a literal murderer. If the love of Jesus is missing, we have already failed the law and are therefore unrighteous—whether we are "righteous" in appearance or not. According to Jesus' statement: "Whoever has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me," we, as lawless people, are obviously without the inner love of Jesus, which allows us to think mercifully, and are therefore unrighteous. In this sense, Jesus told the Pharisees that they were hypocritical because they overlooked the essence of the law, namely mercy. This means: For Jesus, we are all lawless and at best hypocritical law-keepers like the

Pharisees if we lack true mercy, which comes only from Jesus. The Beatitude "Blessed are the merciful" emphasizes this fact once more by showing that our righteousness before God and thus our blessedness depends on mercy. Certainly, Jesus is not referring to human mercy in the blessed mercy. If there were people who are merciful on their own initiative to such an extent that they have their eternal blessedness in their pocket as a result, this would scoff at the entire Gospel of God. This means: True righteousness according to the Sermon on the Mount is only possible when we possess a new life in Christ.

For true righteousness and true obedience are always bound to an inner spiritual life, as seen in "But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness." (Romans 8:10). Paul also wrote: "For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law." (Galatians 3:21). These verses prove that righteousness cannot come merely from studying many moral rules, but requires a living power. This living power comes from Jesus and awakens us to a new life from which righteousness emanates. According to John, we recognize from our brotherly love that we have passed from death to life. This Bible passage proves that, according to the Bible, we are considered lifeless if we are without the love of Jesus and are inwardly dead sinners without the love of Jesus, who stand unrighteous before God. Righteousness is therefore not a mere formula, not a dead theory applied alone, or an applied legal doctrine that can come from human effort and a theoretical knowledge of God's moral demands.

Righteousness needs more than stone tablets with moral demands; it needs the love of Jesus. This is exactly what Jesus wanted to convey when He said that the righteousness of a Pharisee is not enough for the Kingdom of Heaven. They were lawless because they applied the commandments without love and put rules in place of the commandment of love. The many commandments they kept did not change that. So we should not think that we could become righteous by keeping commandments in a formal sense. We should therefore not base our righteousness on rigid paragraphs, but orient ourselves to Jesus and take Him as our standard. If we base our righteousness on Jesus, then His word is our moral foundation. Thus, we who orient ourselves to His righteousness take His love as our standard. This love is described to us in the Sermon on the Mount and stands in contrast to the loveless legalism of the Pharisees. The Sermon on the Mount thus conveys the following message to us: The breeding ground for Pharisaic legalism, which leads to works of the law, is lovelessness and self-righteousness. Without love, we do not act mercifully, but entrench ourselves behind paragraphs, rules, norms, and commandments for outward decency, just like the Pharisees. Since the righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount is exclusively founded in the love and mercy of Jesus, it offers us no room to

entrench ourselves behind paragraphs and thus does not allow us to pretend righteousness.

When our standard is the love of Jesus, and thus the Sermon on the Mount, we will never try to feign righteousness. The love of Jesus compels us to truthfulness and leaves no room for Pharisaic thinking, as it demands perfect **meekness** in contrast to legalism. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount shows that meekness should distinguish us from a Pharisee, so that, unlike them, we may enter the Kingdom of God. David already wrote in Psalm 149:4-5: "For the Lord takes delight in His people; He crowns the humble with victory. Let His faithful people rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds." The Sermon on the Mount conveys the following message to us: According to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is the living law of God, descended from heaven, because He is meek. The symbolism alone makes it clear that Jesus Himself is the fulfillment of the 10 Commandments. Jesus ascended the same mountain where Moses received the stone tablets with the 10 Commandments, to show us that His righteousness is the fulfillment of the 10 Commandments. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount is not a new stone tablet law that burdens us with crushing demands, because at the center of the Sermon on the Mount are Jesus and a relationship with God. It is not for nothing that the Lord's Prayer is in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, for the righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount flows from our sonship of God, which is a result of spiritual new birth. As a result of new birth, it is possible to do the Sermon on the Mount; and this proves our sonship of God. That is why Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that we will be called children of the Most High if our mercy is unconditional. To hear and do the Sermon on the Mount therefore means to be a child of God.

False Teaching Number 2: The Sermon on the Mount Distracts from Action by Emphasizing Attitude

Another false teaching is that Jesus, by emphasizing attitude, wants to distract from action and confronts us in the Sermon on the Mount with a vague ethic of conviction that does not concretely manifest itself in deeds. However, by emphasizing attitude, **Jesus did not relativize action**. Rather, the Sermon on the Mount elevates thoughts to actions, so that an action, according to the Sermon on the Mount, only corresponds to the Christian standard if it flows from the **love and mercy of Jesus**. Thus, according to the Sermon on the Mount, all our deeds count before God and are judged by the standard of divine mercy. Therefore, the Sermon on the Mount does not deal with an ethic of conviction that distracts from action, but with a **righteousness that includes a perfect Christian attitude, which manifests itself in perfectly good deeds**.

Therefore, our works, according to the Sermon on the Mount, should, just like our Christian attitude, stand out perfectly from the crowd and thus overshadow the best do-gooderism. Jesus gave several examples for this: **turning the other cheek to the aggressor**, also giving the cloak if the undergarment is demanded, carrying baggage two miles if an occupying soldier demands one, giving to the one who asks, and not turning away from the one who wants to borrow, **praying wholeheartedly for enemies and even loving enemies**. It is therefore completely absurd to reduce the Sermon on the Mount to a pure ethic of conviction that excludes action, since the merciful attitude demanded in the Sermon on the Mount is realized in deeds. Furthermore, the universally valid **Golden Rule of the Sermon on the Mount excludes all egoism, all unmerciful action, and all willingness to compromise** in our ethical conduct. The Golden Rule states that the attitude of a Christian consists in treating others as he himself would like to be treated, and thus it is not reduced to an attitude that excludes action.

Moreover, for logical reasons alone, the question arises: Is there true mercy without helpfulness, which thereby excludes the doing of good works? No, certainly not. Thus, the statement that the outstanding divinely magnanimous attitude of the Sermon on the Mount excludes action is a contradiction in terms, for we cannot deny such an unconditionally merciful attitude in our deeds. To assume otherwise would be as nonsensical as saying: God is just, yet His actions are unjust.

But of course, the Bible tells us: God is perfectly just, and therefore He acts perfectly justly according to His nature. **Mercy always manifests itself in action**. Even whoever outwardly refuses a good deed thereby has a sinful and unmerciful heart that does not agree with the demanded attitude of the Sermon on the Mount. And so **sins of omission also count as bad deeds** that God condemns and show that the light of the Gospel in no way dwells in us. According to the Sermon on the Mount, on the other hand, we should show a **true active mercy** and stand out through our deeds in such a way that people recognize the light of Christ in us. Jesus said: **"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in**

heaven." These good works distinguish us from the unredeemed world as true Christians. For the works of the world are evil, according to Jesus.

False Teaching Number 3: Many Bible Teachers Say the Sermon on the Mount Is Only a Mirror for Confession, but Not a Standard for a Christian's Righteousness

Due to the divine demand for righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount, those who advocate cheap grace reject it. To invalidate the Sermon on the Mount's content, adherents of cheap grace say: **The Sermon on the Mount has no binding authority for us, because it is only meant to urge us to a confession of sins, so that after a confession we can forget it and tick it off.** These statements, which are heard from many adherents of cheap grace, show how contemptuously and arbitrarily they deal with God's Word. This can be seen simply by the fact that they argue contradictorily.

They admit that the Sermon on the Mount is useful for assessing one's own righteousness and convicting of sins, and at the same time they reject it morally. They believe that the Sermon on the Mount is meant to show us that natural man is a sinner, and that it thus perfectly fulfills its moral purpose, since man is to be saved by cheap grace.

So, adherents of cheap grace say: The Sermon on the Mount is meant to show us that we are naturally sinners who, without grace, stand under the accusation of their sins. This is what needs to be recognized. This recognition is supposed to push us to a **one-time, impenitent confession of sins**, so that we receive cheap grace. After that, the Sermon on the Mount has nothing more to say to us, because **repentance or even a radical turning to a life on the narrow path is not necessary** (since we are redeemed by cheap grace). Thus, the Sermon on the Mount serves us merely for the brief moment of our conversion as a mirror for confession that reveals our own sinfulness. However, it is only meant to fulfill the purpose that we call upon Jesus for cheap grace by asking Him for forgiveness of sins pro forma. After we have done this, we can continue to live as before, because the Sermon on the Mount must not become the standard of our morality.

So much for the statements of the adherents of cheap grace. Regarding their assessment, it must be said: It cannot be the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount to acknowledge it for a moment for the conviction of sins, only to then reject it again. After all, it is **God's Word and the longest speech of Jesus, which holds a central meaning.** God's Word is indeed meant to convict us of our sins by serving as a mirror for confession. But of course, the Word of God is also meant to be applied.

Thus, we should strive to live according to the Word of God. The Word of God should become the content of our lives, and so we should acknowledge our transgressions in the light of the Word of God, and this should move us to a true confession (an honest confession of repentance). The Sermon on the Mount helps us to recognize our transgressions if we take it seriously as a binding standard. Only then does it serve us as a mirror for confession that helps us to an honest confession. (To confess honestly means to confess one's sins in repentance).

Adherents of cheap grace are not even willing to confess their transgressions and see their sins. So they say that the Sermon on the Mount is non-binding and would only serve for a purely formal confession of sins (for the request of cheap grace) as a mirror for confession.

But if we honestly use the Sermon on the Mount as a mirror for confession, we are also willing to let ourselves be convicted of our sins. For a mirror for confession is supposed to bring us to an **honest insight into sin**, so that we repent. A mirror for confession misses its purpose if we cast a fleeting glance into it and then immediately banish it from our lives and throw it into a corner. It is as useless as a mirror that has been taken down, removed so as not to have to look oneself in the eye after a single glance. The Sermon on the Mount thus only serves us as a mirror for confession if we **continually look into it**.

So, adherents of cheap grace ultimately avoid the Sermon on the Mount as a mirror for confession, since they are not even ready for sincere self-examination in the light of the Sermon on the Mount. They do not want to face their own "righteousness" by rejecting the Sermon on the Mount morally. They claim to be righteous, although they are forgetful hearers of the Sermon on the Mount. They claim that it would be enough to be forgetful hearers of the Sermon on the Mount. But this view is unbiblical. According to James, we should constantly keep our eyes on the Word of God like the Sermon on the Mount and examine ourselves in the Word of God. Otherwise, according to James, we forget our sinful appearance in the mirror of God's righteousness, which is the Word of God, and are thus unrighteous before God. Therefore, it cannot be permissible to use the Word of God for a confession of sins and at the same time to reject it as a standard. Moreover, a confession of sins before God without inner repentance with a willingness to turn back is useless, because thereby we do not honestly turn to Jesus and refuse to be cleansed by His sacrifice and to repent. If we merely confess our sins to Jesus to request cheap grace, our confession is only a formal confession of sins without insight into sin. A true confession of sins is of course not based on such a false confession, which is only a formal admission. An honest confession of sins thus presupposes a willingness to repent, and such an honest confession leads to the desire to repent by grace and to live according to God's standard. This means: An dishonest and false confession will never be recognized by God and will certainly not bring us any grace. It is thus certainly not the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount to lead us to a false confession of repentance so that we obtain cheap grace and thereby escape the punishment for our sins.

False Teaching Number 4: In Practical Life, the Sermon on the Mount Is Unsuitable if Applied to Daily Living

Many people take individual statements from the Sermon on the Mount out of context, distorting their meaning to prove that the words of the Sermon on the Mount are supposedly not applicable to practical life. They intend to portray the Sermon on the Mount as unrealistic. Jesus' statement alone, that those who suffer for His sake may consider themselves blessed, contradicts human thinking so much that many do not even want to read the Sermon on the Mount seriously and only mock it. And many say that the Sermon on the Mount in practice would lead us all to have to mutilate ourselves. This refers to Jesus' saying that we should tear out an eye that causes us to sin. It is better to enter the Kingdom of God without this eye than to keep it and go to hell for it.

Many also criticize Jesus for telling us: "Do not worry about clothes or food." Jesus is accused of implying that in practical life this would mean not being allowed to have clothes or food for the next day, and that our families would starve and we would have nothing to wear. Many act as if the Sermon on the Mount would oblige us to rely entirely on God bringing food or clothing into the house. So many say: The Sermon on the Mount is utopian, because a certain amount of foresight is necessary so that we do not starve and Christians do not die out.

Many thus ridicule the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount to sweep its radical message under the rug or to turn the true Gospel into a prosperity or wellness gospel. This is not right, and therefore I would like to address the aforementioned accusations. Regarding the first example, it must be said: The exhortation to tear out the eye is not about self-mutilation of the eye so that we enter heaven. After all, sin resides in the heart, so such an interpretation would make no sense. It is a **serious parable** intended to show us how we should deal with sin, and thus the statement: "It is better to tear out an eye than to go to hell with sin" certainly has a connection to reality. By pointing out that we should cut off a hand if it causes us to sin, Jesus wanted to show the **terrible consequences of sin**. Since cutting off a hand is extremely painful, it should become clear that we should take sin more seriously than any worldly distress, and should not be afraid of physical pain.

This means: **It is better to endure pain than to allow sin**, which ultimately causes us more pain than anything else because it leads to hell. (In this sense, Jesus also said that we should not fear those who harm our body, but should fear Him who has the power to cast us into hell). Thus, we should be concerned about our heart and protect it from harm, to protect ourselves from the indescribably terrible consequences of sin. Nothing is as bad as going to hell, where sin leads us. This means: The parable shows the **seriousness of our need for redemption from sin** and that we must not make the slightest compromise with sin; therefore,

we must shrink from nothing when it comes to our salvation. Moreover, Jesus also said in Mark 9 the following: "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."

This **radical rejection of sin** also explains why Jesus blessed those who are sacrificial, who would rather suffer persecution for the sake of faith than follow the sinful world. Scripture also says that our endurance for Christ pays off, even if it seems easier to follow the sinful world. For Jesus promised a reward only to those who leave everything behind for Him. This is also shown by the following Bible verses: "You know, we have left everything and followed you. What then will there be for us? Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" (Matthew 19:27-28).

If we give something up for Jesus or suffer for Him, we will be blessed, for God also builds His kingdom on our tears and uses precisely those who are weak or defenceless. Therefore, God said to Paul: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"** (2 Corinthians 12:9). Thus, God promised to unfold His strength precisely in our weakness. On the path of suffering, God can accomplish great things through us, and He will surely compensate us for all tragic suffering. So God will wipe away the tears of suffering and transform them into feelings of jubilation – yes, they serve Him as precious stones for His spiritual temple in His kingdom, for all who have suffered for Christ may dwell in it.

The Sermon on the Mount thus wants to make it clear to us that **it is worth suffering for Christ**.

The Sermon on the Mount thus forces us to ask: Do we truly live God-centered, are we truly righteous before God, can we serve Him? Jesus does not set the bar so high for fun. Jesus wanted to put a stop to all hypocrisy. And so Jesus sifted out all those who say to Him, "Lord, Lord," but are unwilling to follow Jesus beyond mere lip service. Likewise, Joshua told the Israelites, who carelessly said that they wanted to serve God, essentially: "You will not be able to serve God. You must completely turn away from your sins to truly be able to serve God." Joshua confronted the Israelites with a crossroads, saying: Either you serve God wholeheartedly and completely, or you live far from God. In the same way, Jesus confronts us with the Sermon on the Mount with a crossroads, by essentially saying: **"If you want to belong to me, take the narrow path, otherwise you will not be able to follow me and therefore not be my disciples who can expect a reward."** And since Jesus is too

precious to let go of Him in tribulation, there is an indescribable reward for the steadfastness of persecuted Christians who stand by Him in tribulation. And so they are declared blessed, because they may truly consider themselves blessed. For their reward for their steadfastness will not only make up for and outweigh their suffering on earth, but will so far exceed their great suffering that they may consider themselves overjoyed. Paul therefore wrote that our suffering as persecuted Christians is insignificant compared to what Christ gives us and that it is worth it for Christ to persevere under tribulation. Therefore, as followers of Jesus, we should also consider ourselves blessed when our life path is not always easy and we are challenged to trust God and experience hardship.

Regarding the argument that the Sermon on the Mount practically forces us to let our families starve because we are supposed to rely on God, it must be said: **Jesus did not say this.** Rather, Jesus essentially said: "If we worry only about God's concerns and focus on God, then God will provide for us and we will prosper. Moreover, you cannot serve God and money. Therefore, the Kingdom of God is not open to those who accumulate earthly treasures instead of valuing the spiritual riches of my grace." Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: We cannot be children of God if our heart is not completely surrendered to God, for serving two masters is a contradiction in terms. Therefore, everything we do should serve God and not Mammon (money idols). So Jesus warned against greed, because greed prevents us from the true treasure of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is Jesus. Living in abundance also means turning our backs on the needy. Here we hear John, who said: **"How can the love of God abide in us if we do not give food to our hungry brother?"** So, with everything we do, including clothing and eating, it is about keeping God in mind. "No one can serve two masters." This means we must be aware that we have a moral responsibility regarding our money. So we should not make an idol of our money, but recognize that **Jesus is the true treasure**, above all earthly goods. However, Jesus did not say that we should close all our bank accounts. Rather, He meant that we must surrender ALL our possessions to God and use them for service to and for Him.

So the question arises for us: Does what we have own us – or does God own it? Are we attached to these things, or do we have a detached relationship with them? Jesus told us very clearly that we cannot be His disciples if we cling to them! Everything we have, God has given us – and it is connected with a purpose and a responsibility. **Feeding our families is obviously part of this responsibility.** Likewise, it is part of this responsibility to provide for one's own food, education, clothing, and shelter. It says that we should earn money with the work of our hands to spend it for important purposes. This also includes self-sufficiency, otherwise we would be destitute ourselves, have no home, and, for example, could not pay our rent, which we owe to the landlord. We are precisely supposed to go to work so as not to be a burden on anyone. Paul admonished that it is important to go to work so as not to be dependent on outside help. Of course, we should also be willing to let go of

possessions for God, and nothing should bind us, especially since we ultimately receive everything we need from God.

The demand that we should not worry about clothes shows that we should not seek security in perishable material things. Otherwise, we will be consumed by the desire for material things and place these things above God. Jesus essentially said: People who do not know God are fixated on material worries, and through their many worries, they cannot put their lives in God's hand. Jesus wanted to make it clear to us how foolish it is to be consumed by worldly worries instead of building on God, by rhetorically asking: **"Can you by being anxious add a single hour to your span of life?"** (Matthew 6:27).

The Sermon on the Mount therefore does not call us to give up all our possessions, but to **not take our money more important than God's concerns**, so that we gladly use it in service to God. Greed is clearly condemned as a logical consequence in the Sermon on the Mount. Fittingly, Paul warned against greed as follows: "This also applies to all who are greedy; for greed is nothing other than idolatry. Let no one deceive you with empty words, telling you that all this is harmless. Precisely with such behavior, those who do not want to obey God incur His wrath. Therefore, do not associate with such people." (Ephesians 5:5-7).

The entire Bible, and not just the Sermon on the Mount, says: We must not deal carelessly with what is entrusted to us materially. This applies even to earthly goods. And all the more so we should deal carefully with the entrusted gift of God's grace, or use God's grace to honor God. Therefore, no grace in Jesus is given to us if we do not even deal with earthly goods in such a way that God is honored, or only invest our money for Mammon. For this, we read in Luke 16:12-13: **"And if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? No servant can serve two masters; either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."**

Paul stated the same truth in similar verses, see 1 Timothy 6:17 and following verses: "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life." Thus, Paul confirmed the Sermon on the Mount, for he also said that **grace obliges us to a responsible handling of money**. This means more than just not stealing, but also being generous. Paul said our attitude is only Christian when we act on the principle: **"It is more blessed to give than to receive."**

An example of such a Christian, generous attitude can be found in Paul, who said in Acts 20:32-35: "And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" The entire Sermon on the Mount is thus confirmed in content throughout the Bible. In this respect, one really cannot play off the Sermon on the Mount against the teaching of the apostles. Also the other evangelists besides Matthew, where we find the Sermon on the Mount, have conveyed to us the words of the Sermon on the Mount in essence. In Luke 14:33-35, there are words that are literally contained in the Sermon on the Mount: **"Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear!"** Good News Bible.

In Luke chapter 14 verses 25 to 30, we read the following exhortation, which is comparable to the concluding exhortation of the Sermon on the Mount: "Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

Similarly, chapter 6 of Luke contains a discourse, the so-called Field Sermon, which is completely identical in content to the Sermon on the Mount, only shorter. We also read the radical words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount in essence, for example, in 1 Peter 3:8-11: "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called that you may obtain a blessing. For 'Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.' Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."

In Romans 12:9-19 or also in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, we read a summary of the content of the Sermon on the Mount in essence, as we are called not to avenge, to love one another, and to live holy lives. In Romans, for example, it says: "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves."

In Romans 12:20, we are exhorted to give food to enemies if they need it, which confirms the principle of loving one's enemies, of which Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount. The fundamental principle of merciful action on the basis of a perfect righteousness, as presented to us by the Sermon on the Mount, thus runs through the entire New Testament. Nevertheless, the Sermon on the Mount is repeatedly presented as a special teaching of the New Testament, which is why some exclude it and dismiss it as a provocative speech that is not implementable in practical life and therefore not relevant. I do not understand why the Sermon on the Mount is often excluded from the Bible and treated as if it were not in harmony with the entire New Testament. For the opposite is the case. It testifies to a great blindness not to see this.

False Teaching Number 5: Many Say the Sermon on the Mount Has Been Abolished

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that he did not come to **abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them**. He added that not one jot of the Law would pass away. Many, however, interpret this statement in a completely absurd way. They claim that Jesus supposedly fulfilled the Law representatively for us, only to ultimately abolish it, which actually contradicts Jesus' own words. To support this thesis, adherents of cheap grace emphasize that the Sermon on the Mount was given before the crucifixion. Adherents of cheap grace thus believe that Jesus Himself withdrew all His righteous demands and the entire Sermon on the Mount by dying on the cross for us as a substitute to fulfill the Law.

Since this contradicts Jesus' above statement, it makes little sense to even pay attention to such a thesis. Now one could object: For an

Israelite, the Law has changed. For them, the **regulations of the ceremonial law are indeed no longer binding**, because Jesus died representatively for us in place of animal sacrifices, and thus fulfilled them. However, the ceremonial law must be seen separately from the actual Law of God, which shows us divine moral standards. For it was only meant to be applied to atone for sin and becomes unnecessary if we observe the moral law

Jesus recognized the special status of the ceremonial law and did not address it when asked about the meaning of the Law. Thus, He summarized the entire Law in the **commandment of love**, because the ceremonial law does not belong to the moral law, and for Jesus, it is not part of the moral law. And so Jesus' statement also makes sense when He said: "Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest jot of the Law will pass away." Nevertheless, many equate the word "Law" with the entire Law of Moses, as Jesus spoke to Israelites who were familiar with it. And so the question arises: What is Jesus referring to when He spoke of the Law and the Prophets, which He did not want to abolish but to fulfill? To clarify this, we should first ask ourselves: What is the Law and the Prophets that Jesus wants to fulfill?

Jesus said more precisely: "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for **this is the Law and the Prophets**. Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:12-14). The commandment of the **Golden Rule**, which involves respecting and treating our fellow human beings as we ourselves would like to be treated, is obviously meant by the Law and the Prophets. The Golden Rule is derived from the principle of love and requires true mercy. In other words, the Golden Rule states that we should **love others as ourselves** and thus concretizes itself in the commandment of love.

Since Jesus obviously did not abolish the commandment of love, the Law and the Prophets apply to us. It has not been weakened by a single jot. On the contrary, it is to be fulfilled through grace. All the apostles took the Law and the Prophets and thus the commandment of love completely seriously, for they emphasized the importance of the commandment of love and declared that our entire Christian life depends on love. It is therefore nonsensical to believe that Jesus abolished the Law and the Prophets and invalidated God's Law through His death on the cross.

False Teaching Number 6: The Narrow Path Is Incompatible with the Gift of Grace Because It Demands Costly Discipleship

Adherents of cheap grace claim that grace, as a gift, must not cost us anything and is therefore incompatible with a discipleship that always costs us something. Thus, grace cannot be tied to the narrow path,

because this path requires a costly discipleship. However, they overlook that, according to Jesus' words, **only the narrow path leads into the Kingdom of Heaven**, and it is therefore obviously compatible with grace. Furthermore, the question arises: Why did the original apostles precede us on the narrow path and teach it as binding? Were these not the same apostles who preached that grace, with all its promises of blessings, is a gift of faith? One thing is clear: **Precisely they believed in a grace that saves us freely**. Let's take the Apostle Paul as an example. The Apostle Paul spoke a great deal about grace, which is offered to us freely as a gift of faith and saves us without our own merits. Despite all this, he considered himself bound to the narrow path, which cost him much.

And he taught that the churches should imitate him and accept the costs of discipleship. From this, we can see that our path of faith should indeed cost something, although grace is given to us for our salvation. If we understand the concept of grace, we can resolve this seeming contradiction and understand why this is so. First, it is important to understand that grace in the Bible means more than undeserved kindness or favor from God. For **grace involves a new life in Jesus**. We receive this life in Christ as a gift of faith thanks to the work of redemption, and thus completely free of charge. And as long as we walk in the new life, which is Christ Himself, we can be assured of salvation, for He is our righteousness, which justifies and perfects us before God. And this new life, which is Jesus Himself, expresses itself through a **discipleship on the narrow path**, because Jesus cannot be separated from the narrow path. The narrow path is based on the love and righteousness of Jesus. Therefore, following Jesus on the narrow path is the natural outcome of our new life, which grace bestows upon us.

This discipleship may cost us something. But we do not pay for the new life in Jesus through discipleship. It is and remains a gift. The costs of discipleship do not change that. They are not the means of payment for our salvation, for we cannot earn this new life through works. Life in Christ is given to us solely through an **inner rebirth by the power of sovereign grace**, by accepting Jesus' work in faith. But this gifted new life binds us to Jesus and to His way and thus to discipleship, because it is defined in Christ; indeed, Christ *is* this new life. Paul never denied this, and so he never said that we as Christians can avoid a costly discipleship. When he spoke of grace, which is given to us as a divine gift and saves us without merit thanks to Jesus' work, he was referring to the **gift of new life in Christ**. He meant that we receive this life freely through faith without prior merits or preconditions, and it is given through the work of redemption by grace.

The gift of new life is **prepaid by the finished work of Jesus** and is priceless for us, and we also do not need to pay for it, because the costs were fully borne by Jesus. This does not change our responsibility to follow Jesus, even if it involves costs. The costs we incur for discipleship are ultimately not a precondition for the new life in Christ and thus no

human contribution to acquire the gift of new life. They merely result from the path of life with Christ, whereby life in Christ remains a gift of grace. Paul also saw it this way. Paul insisted that we cannot pay for our salvation ourselves, and that it happens solely by grace. However, he did not say that we are cheaply redeemed and saved to lead a comfortable life adapted to the world. Therefore, he never called for taking the path of least resistance. Quite the opposite, and so Paul never claimed that grace excludes suffering for Christ's sake. Rather, he saw the saving and gifted life in Christ, which calls for following Jesus, as **connected with suffering**.

This suffering arises from the fact that the world, as Jesus Himself said, accepts only its own kind and persecutes all who are not of the world. The gifted life in Jesus is therefore connected with the costs of discipleship, because it spiritually separates us from the world, so that we do not belong to the world (even if we live in the world). In extreme cases, we even have to endure **true Christian persecution** to be separated from the world and to belong to Jesus, just as the Apostle Paul endured persecution. Paul therefore saw suffering for Christ's sake as a necessary cross of discipleship that belongs to a Christian life. He never claimed that grace grants us a beautiful earthly life. The gift of grace ultimately includes Jesus and His righteousness, not a beautiful earthly life free from all suffering. (After all, true Christians who live under grace are obviously not excluded from suffering and from all problems and hardships in the world, and Jesus never said that Christians on earth only "lick sugar"). And moreover, Paul saw suffering for Christ's sake as a special sacrifice for Jesus and a special gift of grace, because in suffering for Christ he learned more and more to persevere in his faith, to grow in faith, and to walk in grace under all circumstances of life. And so he recognized that precisely suffering for Christ's sake brought him godliness and connectedness with Christ, because in suffering he deepened his relationship with Jesus and could live out the new life in him through all its highs and lows.

And so he saw it as a privilege and a special grace to suffer for Christ in discipleship, because through it he was allowed to be especially close to Christ. For the costs of discipleship seemed insignificant to him compared to the value of the person of Jesus. Paul therefore regarded the losses and costs he bore for Jesus as a gain for Christ's sake. Everything he gave up for Jesus he saw as a gain, because he had the goal of **gaining Christ as the precious pearl**. And so he gave up his life and his righteousness to gain Christ and follow Him. He knew that he would only gain Christ through self-denial, and he could not and would not avoid stony paths for it. And therefore, he evangelized at the risk of his life and thereby followed the narrow path of the Sermon on the Mount. Finally, Paul regarded the person of Jesus as the true saving gift of grace and understood that the narrow path is connected with Christ. He was clear that it was his Christian mission, by grace, to walk the narrow path, and for this purpose, he should walk in the new life in Christ. That this narrow path brings suffering became painfully clear to him again and again, for

he suffered much, and yet he wrote even in prison about the joy he had thanks to grace and Christ. For he valued grace so much precisely because it does not grant cheap salvation, but inwardly glorifies us in suffering for Jesus. He taught that we should become like Christ and therefore learn self-sacrifice for God, like Jesus. He thus recognized that the grace of God is infinitely valuable precisely because it gives us the willpower and dynamism to follow Jesus' selfless, narrow path.

The narrow path is therefore the path of faith for all those who have accepted Christ, because **grace itself calls to discipleship and is given to us for this purpose.** Thus, there is no cheap grace that frees us from the responsibility of following Jesus, so that we can enter the Kingdom of Heaven on the comfortable and wide path. Peter also taught this. In 1 Peter 5, at the end of the chapter, we read the call to remain steadfast in suffering when persecution comes upon the church. Thereupon Peter affirmed that he proclaimed true grace, because there were apparently people who spoke of a grace that was not true grace. So there were certainly already preachers at that time who promised cheap grace. Heretics have always liked to portray grace as a free ticket to heaven and acted as if it were an invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven that one can accept with a non-committal "Yes." The motto of cheap grace is: "You are all invited to come to the Kingdom of Heaven. You just have to give your pious 'yes' to grace, so that you enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

The Bible tells us: This is only a half-truth. God does indeed invite us all to return to Him through grace so that we may enter His Kingdom of Heaven, because Jesus atoned for all people. But He does not accept everyone who feels addressed by His invitation. **His invitation requires an honest and grateful response.** Not all who respond positively to this invitation and affirm it are allowed to be at the great wedding feast that belongs to the chosen ones. In the end, God will only accept those who truly appreciate His offer. This is what the parable in Matthew 22 wants to tell us. According to this parable, a king wants to invite as many people as possible to a feast. Many people, however, say they are too busy to attend this invitation to the feast, which stands for God. They do not appreciate the generosity of the king, who wants to prepare a great feast for everyone, and therefore they pay no attention to the invitation. They decline from the outset.

Others gratefully accept the invitation and come to the feast in appropriate festive attire. Others, however, come to the feast in inappropriate attire, because they show no respect to the king and only come for their own benefit. They do not understand that the king is due honor for the feast and only want to stuff their bellies and exploit the king's generosity. Therefore, they are cast out. The parable is meant to show us: **Whoever responds to God's offer of grace in a purely formal way is far from being chosen, for as unrepentant sinners, we have no free entry to the Kingdom of Heaven.** Thus, grace is not reduced to a ticket to heaven that is offered to every sinner who formally

says "yes" to grace. Grace is a living ticket that brings us into the Kingdom of Heaven, because it binds us to Jesus and His righteousness. Therefore, all who want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven through cheap grace will ultimately be disappointed, for they will find no grace and mercy with God.

And God will cast them into darkness according to the following parable in Matthew 22: "And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fattened calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

This parable also proves that **we can never deceive God** and that only a sincere acceptance of His grace saves us.

What Does the Sermon on the Mount Tell Us About the Purpose of Grace?

Jesus ascended a mountain before He began to preach His famous Sermon on the Mount from the high ground. He positioned Himself above the crowd to proclaim what His future kingdom, which He intends to establish through His grace, would look like. In this way, the **interplay of grace and righteousness** is depicted symbolically. On the one hand, the Sermon on the Mount reveals the divine righteousness of the Preacher of the Mount, which is superior to human righteousness. At the same time, the Sermon on the Mount points us to **grace in the person of Jesus**. In a gracious manner, He stretches out His hands to us to save us. Thus, Jesus stood on a mountain to symbolically show that we need a righteousness that is higher than human righteousness. He, as personified grace, proclaims His divine moral principles on a mountain so

that all may look up to Him and pay attention to Him as their Redeemer. He wants us to understand the following: His grace does not change God's majestic righteousness, for He grants us grace because we are a fallen creation.

Thus, Jesus chose a distance from the people to show the lostness of human creation. For this creation, Jesus is therefore the **only hope for righteousness**. He is the living **throne of grace** to which we may come to be made righteous before God. For in Him, a divine righteousness is accessible and available to all who sincerely want to return to God. But it can only be received with empty hands. Whoever wants to come to the throne of grace must be aware of how poor he is before God and how much he needs Jesus for the sake of righteousness. Thus, Jesus symbolically wanted to demonstrate His unbending sublimity of His righteousness on the mountain. In this way, we are to recognize that He does not compromise His righteousness for our sake, but wants to free us from the deep swamp of sin in which we are stuck. This should make it clear that **grace and righteousness belong together**, which is also evident in the person of Jesus. Like two rivers flowing into a great stream, grace and righteousness flow together in Jesus and cannot be separated from each other. Thus, Jesus brings God's righteous demands to their full measure, for in Him all of God's demands come to their divinely appointed ultimate goal, which is the **unconditional love of Jesus**. Whoever believes that a compromise between divine and human righteousness would be possible through grace is greatly mistaken. Jesus makes it clear in the introduction that He must step in as mediator between man and God because God cannot yield a single millimeter to human righteousness.

And the chasm between human and divine righteousness is indescribably vast, and only through grace can it be overcome. Grace is thus intended to establish missing righteousness. How this is to happen is shown in the Sermon on the Mount. It describes the desired **faith-righteousness**. And it reveals what constitutes true righteousness before God and how it should differ from human righteousness. Through the **Beatitudes**, we learn the conditions to which our blessedness is tied. And since our blessedness depends solely on grace, the blessed people are obviously under grace. Their blessedness by grace is based on their inner attitude. They are passionate and willing to suffer for the sake of righteousness, as well as perfectly gentle. Thus, the Beatitudes characterize people who are under the grace of God. One can say the following about them: They do not try to please God through desperate religious efforts. Their righteousness flows from an inner perfection that flows from grace. The Beatitudes show that **Jesus' characteristics condition our salvation**. Thus, we can count ourselves blessed if we are inwardly captivated by Jesus.

It does not depend on external circumstances. Even in persecution, we are to count ourselves blessed, as the Beatitude: "**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake**" shows. That a person is

blessed even in suffering sounds paradoxical. According to the Bible, however, it is not a curse but a blessing to suffer for Jesus. For it is precisely in our weakness that the **power of grace** unfolds. Moreover, through suffering for God, we earn the crown of righteousness. Whoever suffers for Jesus is truly close to God and glorified. Thus Paul said that we are glorified with Jesus in suffering for God. Likewise, Paul boasted in his weakness when he had a painful thorn in his flesh and heard the words of God: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Thus Paul regarded his suffering as a good thing, because God's power of grace worked all the more strongly in him. Strength in suffering and grace thus belong together and condition our blessedness. According to the Bible, the word blessedness means a **godly state of heart** that is realized through an intimate relationship with God.

Blessedness, according to the Bible, therefore does not mean that everything goes according to one's own plan. Blessedness, according to the Bible, means being close to God and experiencing happiness therein. As the Psalmist David already said: **"To be near God is my delight."** Thus, in the biblical sense, we cannot become blessed by seeking our personal happiness according to human life plans. We only become blessed when we tie our life's happiness to Jesus. And this also means, regardless of life circumstances, to seek our happiness in Jesus, and thus to follow Him even in suffering. Through such an uncompromising discipleship, we show that we are on the saving path of faith. In contrast, we are not on the saving path of faith of a disciple if we reject following Jesus due to self-interest. The path of faith of true disciples, according to the Bible, cannot even begin without our giving up all earthly things for Jesus.

Ultimately, we can only become disciples if we renounce all earthly things for Jesus' sake and deny ourselves for His sake, to follow Him. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount shows us that we need more than an impersonal, run-of-the-mill faith in Jesus that leaves our hearts hard. Our hearts must not be closed to Jesus' will and ways if we want to obtain salvation. Our faith should therefore take on a **personal connection to Jesus**. True faith means living in connection with Jesus and entrusting all paths of life to Him. Thus, we should not invent our own ways and follow Jesus "blindly." This also includes venturing onto the narrow path. Whoever does not strive for the narrow path, however, forfeits grace, for **faithfulness and discipleship pave our path of grace**. We cannot seek our own ways and at the same time live in trust in Jesus. Faith also includes the courage to walk on the water of faith and to engage with Jesus' words. And so it is important not to question the narrow path. We should walk on this path in childlike trust, even if it leads us through narrow gorges that challenge our faith. But true faith leads to **self-conquest**, and this must be learned in faith so that we become more and more like Jesus. And only those who are like Him can also overcome the world like Him and conquer all difficulties and hostilities of faith through righteousness. The narrow path stands for the **divine way of self-denial** that Jesus went before us in perfect obedience to the Father. Our

salvation thus includes true devotion and surrender to Jesus, which goes hand in hand with self-denial.

Whoever is captivated by the doctrine of cheap grace, however, will contradict this fact. According to this doctrine, the purpose of grace is to grant us a cheap salvation without repentance, whereby following Jesus would be unnecessary. To support cheap grace, many say that our salvation would not come from our own self-exertion and pious achievements. Our salvation would thus be a pure matter of faith and nothing we could earn ourselves. In the Bible, however, it essentially says: **Our salvation is a gift of faith that we cannot earn or merit - but not a gift of cheap grace.** This means: We cannot achieve our fitness for heaven through pious efforts, and thus we cannot earn our salvation through our own efforts or merit it through works.

Our fitness for heaven is given to us in the **gifts of grace of Jesus**, provided we walk in the new life in Christ and live out of grace. And the gifts of grace of Jesus enable us a revolutionary life according to the example of Jesus. In Christian life practice, we cannot continue to live untouched by grace as before a conversion. Grace urges us, through the gifted gifts of grace, to put our lives in the service of God. Thus, it is true that our salvation does not come from our human merits. However, this must not be an excuse to lead a comfortable life on the wide path of the world. So grace does not entitle us to do nothing and continue to live as before. After all, we are not redeemed for a bland and lukewarm faith life. On the contrary, we are redeemed by grace for a **powerful life that testifies to the saltiness of Jesus and expresses itself in devotion to God.** True devotion also means to fully commit oneself to God. In this sense, we should, in the power of the Spirit, spare no effort or cost to stand up for the values of Jesus. So we should burn for Jesus and separate ourselves from the world. As true Christians, we cannot adapt to the world because Christ lives in us. So we will not participate in the works of darkness, but lead an blameless life on the narrow path.

This happens automatically in discipleship under the leadership of Jesus, because we walk with Jesus as the light of the world. In following Jesus, we thus live entirely for God's concerns and are not infected by the darkness of the world. Thus, grace helps us to hold fast to righteousness, even if it costs us something. In this sense, the Bible demands **perseverance in tribulations** from us as believers. In the Bible, it says that we must enter the Kingdom of God through tribulations. So we must not believe preachers who say: The grace of God guarantees us that our lives will always run smoothly according to our wishes and plans. We don't have to give up anything for Jesus, and certainly not go through tribulations into the Kingdom of God. It is enough to go to church services that give us a wellness oasis of relaxation. Whoever wants to follow Jesus radically takes on a difficult path. This cannot be God's will, as our salvation is a cheap gift.

In contrast to such promises of cheap salvation, the Sermon on the Mount conveys the following message: **Grace grants us dignity and standing before God by giving us the humility to endure disgrace and suffering for God.** It helps us to take up the cross of discipleship. Grace thus makes us true followers of Jesus by giving us patience and perseverance for God. In discipleship, we do not follow the broad current of the world, but swim against the current of the masses. Thus, we must expect resistance from the worldly counter-current. Persecution and hostilities often confront us in discipleship. But we are called to endure this resistance to truly qualify for the Kingdom of Heaven. This resilience is also given to us by Jesus. After all, Jesus' steadfastness belongs to the gifts of grace. Thus, we are redeemed to resist the temptations of the world and the attacks of the world. The grace of God thus grants us godliness even in suffering. In suffering for Jesus, the grace of God even unfolds especially. Our earthly life with Jesus therefore does not exclude suffering. Jesus also by no means promised us heaven on earth. He promised us eternal life as the reward of our faithfulness in earthly existence. Our gifts of grace should not serve self-gratification, but divine goals. The gifts of grace lead to a God-centered life and do not consist, as prosperity preachers say, in perishable riches.

All gifts of grace refer to Jesus and His riches, for they come from Him. All gifts of grace thus represent heavenly and spiritual goods that are found in the person of Christ and characterize His holy character. And precisely for this reason, they serve an **inner godliness**, for godliness presupposes joy in God Himself and His blessings. In contrast to prosperity preachers, our godliness does not depend on material prosperity, and God does not bless us through earthly goods. The grace of God blesses us by drawing us to God, so that we may get to know Him and learn to love Him and serve Him in devotion. This does not lead to a religiously rigid works-righteousness according to the example of the Pharisees. For desperate religious efforts are something completely different from true devotion to God and are never connected with an inner godliness. Devotion to God, in contrast to religious zeal, brings about **sincere obedience and faithfulness in quiet determination**, which expresses itself in discipleship on the narrow path. Devotion to God is a fruit of grace which, as it says in Ephesians, roots us in the love of Jesus, which exceeds our comprehension. Devotion to God means that we are ignited by the inner passionate fire of Jesus' love and are infected by Jesus' zeal, about which it is written in John: **"Zeal for your house will consume me."** The Sermon on the Mount emphasizes that our faith is bland and worthless if we lack the devoted love of Jesus, which makes us burn inwardly for our fellow human beings and God. A faith that is not active in the love of Jesus is called dead by the Bible, for it bears no fruit for God and is useless, even if it can move mountains, see the Song of Love in Corinthians. Faith without love can lead to religious zeal, which is however not accompanied by devotion to God. So the Pharisees also zealously tried to please God. And yet their zeal was religious fanaticism without devotion to God.

The Sermon on the Mount does not describe the life path of religious zealots who give their lives for God because of religious fanaticism. Rather, it describes by what kind of **zeal of love** we are captivated when our faith is alive and thus testifies to the fruit of Jesus' love. The true love of Jesus leads us to lay down our lives for God, because we love God and not to achieve religious goals. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount describes how radically true disciples live set apart for God, because they truly and lovingly strive for God's concerns. The Sermon on the Mount describes the faith-righteousness of a true disciple who follows Jesus out of true devotion to God because he is inwardly captivated by Him. It speaks into our conscience and tells us that by grace we should become **salty followers who live in devotion to God and imitate Jesus on the narrow path**. And thus we should face the challenge of the Sermon on the Mount in faith, for it is to come into its own in living faith. For this, it is important to hear it with open ears, to be able to realize it in faith by following Jesus by grace. Jesus therefore admonishes us with all urgency to hear and do the Sermon on the Mount. Otherwise, according to His words, we can never be blessed. Thus, we cannot dispute the significance of the Sermon on the Mount, for it guides us into all truth, and Jesus lived it out with every fiber of His being. The revolutionary tone of the Sermon on the Mount reflects the essence of Jesus, which captivates true disciples who find a new being in Jesus. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount spiritually opens our eyes to our Christian life mission if we use it as eye ointment to see. It sheds light on the meaning of grace and on our Christian calling. In the light of the Sermon on the Mount, we can fully recognize and respond to the calling of a true Christian. Therefore, Jesus admonished at the end of the Sermon on the Mount to take His words seriously, so as not to overlook and miss one's own calling, but to embrace it.

Whoever hears and does the Sermon on the Mount thus fulfills the calling of a Christian, because he follows the **narrow path that Christ went before us**. And so we qualify for the Kingdom of Heaven by hearing and doing the Sermon on the Mount, even if the path of discipleship seems uncomfortable. Accordingly, we should strive for the narrow path of the Sermon on the Mount, for it is the only path connected with Christ and leads through the gate of eternal life. Paul also struggled with all the strength of faith for the narrow gate.

Paul spoke in Philippians 3 about striving with all the strength of faith for the goal of perfect sanctification. He said that he was on the way to this goal and was unsure whether he had fully grasped the goal. But precisely because he was close to the goal of complete sanctification, yet had not yet surely grasped it, he struggled passionately, with fighting spirit, discipline, and perseverance tirelessly under constant persecution for the prize of victory of a completed and perfect discipleship of Christ.

This commitment led to the determination to complete the race of faith and never give up the goal that lay before him. In Acts, he said, because of this inner determination, that he was ready to sacrifice his life to

complete the race of faith. In Timothy, he spoke in the face of his impending sacrificial death as a result of his faithfulness to Jesus, that he had fought the good fight of faith and had thus completed the race of faith. Because of his desire to finish the narrow path through all resistance, he reached his desired goal of perfect sanctification. As we see in Paul's words, it is above all in the Christian calling to hold fast to the goal of sanctification and perfect discipleship of Christ. With this goal in mind, we can strive for the narrow gate and, by the power of grace, realize the Sermon on the Mount. Thus, we reach the goal of faith, to follow the path that Christ went before us.

If we are not sure that we have grasped the goal of perfected faith, then all the more should we hold fast to Jesus as the author and perfecter of faith. For He will guide us on the pilgrimage to a perfected discipleship of Christ on the narrow path of life in steps of faith, solidify our steps of faith on the right path, deepen our faith, and always preserve us from temptations. He strengthens our faith so that we grow in Him and thereby overcome our fears and weaknesses. He wants us to be perfected in Him, so that we walk in His strength. If we now hold fast to the goal of sanctification in trust in Jesus, we will certainly find the narrow gate into the Kingdom of Heaven for eternal life. Finally, Paul said that we are more than conquerors when we walk in faith. **By the power of grace, we should and can prove ourselves worthy of the Kingdom of God** by accepting the challenge in faith to enter the Kingdom of Heaven through the narrow gate

Christian Freedom

The word **freedom** has a different meaning in a Christian sense than in a worldly sense. In a worldly sense, freedom means leading a life according to one's own fashion and realizing one's individual desires. The Scripture, however, tells us that there is **no freedom outside of Jesus**, and we are unfree if we do not submit ourselves to Jesus in everything we do. Freedom in the Christian sense, according to the Bible, means submitting to the **authority of Jesus** to live according to His will. For most people, this sounds more like a limitation of freedom. And if we read Jesus' conditions for discipleship, which consist of denying oneself for Jesus and carrying one's cross, one might think that a life of discipleship is indeed associated with great losses of freedom. Jesus ultimately said that we should follow Him on the radical narrow path of the Sermon on the Mount, which requires self-sacrifice for God. For many, this sounds like a very hard message that they are not eager to accept, and so many overlook Jesus' call to discipleship because following this call supposedly costs a lot of freedom.

Many therefore reject Jesus and call themselves **freethinkers**. They say they are autonomous from everyone, their own boss, and the freest people in the world, who are subject to no master but do their own thing. But according to the Bible, this freedom of a freethinker does not exist, because even a freethinker is subject to a master and a ruling power. The

Bible tells us: We are all **slaves** – either we are slaves of sin under the dominion of the divine adversary (whose name I do not even want to mention) or we are slaves of Christ under divine, loving guidance. According to this understanding, the question is not whether we are slaves, but only **who our master is**, to whom we are subjected and whom we serve. Everyone is thus subject to a ruling power and serves it slavishly. Peter expressed this as follows: "For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved."

By which ruling power we allow ourselves to be overcome depends on ourselves. If we submit to Jesus, He takes dominion over us. Otherwise, we are under negative ruling power. To be a slave is thus inevitable, so that we cannot free ourselves from all bonds to create our own freedom independently of all power influences. Paul said this in the following words: "Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." From this, it becomes clear: A change of dominion takes place from a life as a slave of sin to a **voluntary slave of Jesus** when we turn to Jesus. The slavery of sin, as the above quote shows, means being "free" from righteousness and therefore not having eternal life, and the slavery of Jesus means the opposite. True freedom in the biblical sense is thus not unbinding, but a **spiritual freedom: namely, freedom from the power of sin**. When we live under the dominion of Christ, we can joyfully exclaim: "O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds" (Psalm 116:16). Thus, under Christian freedom, we can thank God, "who has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

However, it seems strange that, according to Paul, we experience freedom by becoming slaves of righteousness through Jesus' dominion. With the term "slave," we associate a person in an oppressed position who is only supposed to execute commands and has no standing before the master, as normally a slave is subordinate to the master and has no relationship with the master. But under Christian dominion, this is not the case; rather, there is a **personal relationship between Jesus and a disciple**, based on mutual, complete appreciation. Under Christian dominion, we do not live in the position of an oppressed slave or servant who is forced by his master to constantly execute commands for the sake of humiliation, which he is supposed to fulfill in the sense of blind obedience. Jesus will never force us to an undignified obedience that serves our own subjugation, for He is not a tyrant, but wants to live in friendship with us. Jesus said in John 15 that as disciples, we are not in an

impersonal master-servant relationship with Him, and He calls us, His servants, not servants, but even **friends**.

So the question arises why the Bible refers to us as slaves under Christian dominion, while on the other hand, we stand in a personal friendship relationship with Jesus.

To understand this, one should look more closely at the position of a slave to his master. A slave lives in dependence on his master, who uses him according to his goals and plans, which, of course, his master can exploit and has often exploited. Often, therefore, we associate the term "slave" with exploitation and oppression. Thus, we associate a slave's life with a lifestyle dictated by a tyrant. The biblical image of a slave of Jesus, however, is not meant to convey that a Christian life consists of an unworthy slave life. It is meant to clarify that a Christian life consists of **completely surrendering oneself to Jesus**. For a slave is completely devoted to his master, does not devise his own paths in life, but is subject to his master in everything he does. He belongs to his master as his purchased chattel and therefore lives entirely in his service. This relationship between a slave and his master can be transferred to the relationship of a Christian to Jesus. According to Paul, the price of redemption is that our lives belong to Jesus. The word "redemption" comes from the word "ransom," and the ransom was the required purchase price to buy a slave free from his master and win him for oneself.

Thereafter, the slave was obligated to the new owner, and the old owner could no longer dispose of him. Through Jesus' ransom sacrifice, we, as converted Christians, have been bought free from the slave market of sins, so that Jesus can take possession of us. Paul wrote: "For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise, he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God" (1 Corinthians 7:22-24). Moreover, it must be considered: A slave cannot assert his own rights and is dependent on the master's favor. Thus, the slave fares best who belongs to a master who regards him as a son or brother and does not want to legally subjugate him. Such a master is Jesus, so that we fare well only when we live in His or God's dependence. The story of the prodigal son confirms this truth. And so the prodigal son experienced no freedom outside the reach of his father, but only distress and despair, until he gave up his own way and returned to the father, who symbolically represents God. This shows that a so-called self-determined life according to one's own will leads to despair.

Without God, we even lose our lives in a spiritual sense. When the prodigal son returned to his father, the father therefore said: "This my son was dead, and is alive again," and out of joy over his regained life, he prepared a feast for the son. But not only this story, but also the following words show that we can only become happy in dependence on God: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart,

and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). What Jesus meant is that it is best for us if we let ourselves be guided by Him in His ways. He used an image from agriculture. Oxen are forced into a yoke so that they can be guided in paths. Oxen accustomed to plowing fields are harnessed together by a yoke on their necks. When a new ox is taught to plow, it is harnessed with an experienced ox. The new ox is then forced to go in the same direction and at the same pace as the old ox. A yoke harnesses or forces us into something that pushes us in a certain direction.

Under the yoke of Jesus, we will walk with Jesus on the path that pleases Him, never rushing ahead to do anything without His guidance, nor lagging behind when He calls us to a new step of obedience. This is what it means to be under the yoke of Jesus. This yoke, according to Jesus, is not a burden that presses on the shoulders, but gentle. This yoke will by no means crush or confine us. Under this yoke, according to Jesus, we will find **peace and freedom**. Few understand the meaning of the yoke. And few are willing to take it upon themselves. The ox is forced by its owner to put the yoke on its neck. Jesus invites us. It is a well-intentioned offer from Jesus that we allow ourselves to be harnessed into the yoke of Jesus. How foolish are we if we reject this invitation! But according to our human conceptions of freedom, we prefer to take on the heavy yoke of our own self-will with all its frustrations, defeats, and regrets than the light yoke of Jesus, which brings us true freedom and deep rest. But if we believe the Bible, we must admit that we are slaves of ourselves and our own ruin if we do not harness ourselves into Jesus' yoke.

Under the yoke of Jesus, we are free because in Jesus we are no longer subject to the world and its lusts and no longer follow our impulses that enslave us in a negative sense. The guiding questions of our lives are then no longer: What must I have? What gives me pleasure? What helps me advance? The person under the yoke of Jesus is free because, instead of being slaves of themselves, they live guided by the Spirit. Paul wrote: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17). If the Spirit controls us, we can live with devotion for God, for the Spirit of God is subject to God's will and law. Thus, for a person under the yoke of Jesus, the following Bible words are fulfilled: "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12 - ELB). The person who is set free by Jesus stands in contrast to the worldly person who tries to satisfy their urge for freedom by listening to their ego and following their desires. The worldly person wants to free themselves from all frustrations by paving an individual path according to their ideas of freedom or by seeking the feeling of freedom within themselves. But in doing so, they are led astray like the prodigal son, for their thoughts and actions are in the chains of their sins, which imprison them and distance them from God. The person in Christian freedom, in contrast, submits their thoughts to Jesus. Thanks to the renewal of the senses that God grants them (see Romans 12), the person in Christian freedom strives solely to follow the example of Jesus. The Scripture

therefore states: The way of the disciple is the same as the way of the Lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be like his master. This means: In Christian freedom, we do not want to emphasize our individuality and put our personality in the foreground, as we want to "realize" the person of Jesus instead of our ego, and therefore live in a relationship with Him. Our pursuit of happiness in Christian freedom is fulfilled by living in a blessed relationship with God and Jesus. Since God is a perfect heavenly Father for us in Christian freedom, we find in Him the fulfillment of all desires and our true meaning of life.

The worldly person, on the other hand, tries to assert their ego by realizing themselves, because they do not know God and the value of an inwardly fulfilling relationship with God. The worldly person wants to fulfill their own meaning in life by leading their life to a self-determined goal, for they define their meaning and value in life by what they achieve to assert their ego. Thus, the worldly person hopes to find happiness in their own so-called self-realization and to achieve an inner feeling of freedom. But their own heart's desires lead them astray, and thereby they are unfree. For it is written in Jeremiah: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" And so the person who seeks worldly freedom will be a slave to their laborious efforts to provide themselves with freedom and happiness (see Ecclesiastes 2:22: "For what does a man get from all his toil and the striving of his heart with which he toils under the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity."). It happens, therefore, out of vanity to chase after one's own ideas of freedom independent of God. And the end of it is drudgery that makes one unhappy. In contrast, a person in Christian freedom has recognized that true, blessed freedom is a precious good that does not flow from one's own efforts. They accept the freedom offered by God, which Jesus acquired on the cross. And this freedom stands on a secure foundation, as it is guaranteed to us by God. The person under the yoke of Jesus therefore does not try to fight for their freedom with their own means. They can inwardly rest in the gifted freedom that we have in Jesus and entrust all concerns to God.

Finally, God has promised that He will turn our lives for good if we cast all our cares on Him (see 1 Peter 5:7). And moreover, Jesus promised us that God will clothe and feed us if we turn to Him. According to Jesus, we should seek the righteousness of the kingdom of heaven, so that everything we need will come to us through God's hand - at least in the long run. Under worldly striving for freedom, on the other hand, one's own worries crush the worldly person, as they have to solve and master their worries and problems themselves. Worldly troubles throw the worldly person off track, while the person in Christian freedom is carried through these troubles by hope, because they know their life is safe in God. According to John 14, Jesus also grants us inner peace in Christian freedom even in troubles, which we cannot experience in the world, because only discord comes from the world, and the world offers nothing but difficulties. In Jesus, according to John 14, we overcome the world and do not need to be anxious about worldly problems.

This does not change the fact that as Christians, we can suffer great problems and distress in the world. However, God also promises to assist us in tribulations. God's possibilities exceed all human strengths, so that we always find a way out of troubles. Often, God has supernaturally protected His children and preserved them from harm that God's enemies planned. God protected Daniel when he was in the fiery furnace, so that he survived the fire without the slightest harm. For whoever submits to God stands under God's protection and experiences His help. And so, even in difficult times, we can forget sorrow and rejoice in God in Christian freedom. Nehemiah therefore states: "Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). This joy, of which Nehemiah spoke, is a fruit of the Spirit and consists of a true godliness that follows from Christian freedom. God also promises us above all in the future in the kingdom of heaven a perfect blessedness if we hold fast to Him. This blessedness is described in 1 Corinthians 2:9: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."

This Bible passage shows: What God offers us in contrast to the world in terms of inner joy in life surpasses human imagination. Worldly moments of happiness, on the other hand, do not fulfill the soul and will ultimately only disappoint us, for David wrote in Psalm 112: "The desire of the wicked will perish." The desire of the wicked concerns material prosperity, a high social standing, and a luxurious life, or the satisfaction of lusts to flatter one's own ego. Often, the worldly person tries to buy their freedom to become happy according to their values. Through money, they try to enable a free life. They cling to their purchased goods, which nevertheless promise them no security and thus no true happiness in life. Whoever lives in Christian freedom, on the other hand, will not tie their value of life to purchasable things. In Christian freedom, we rejoice in the true treasure of the kingdom of heaven, which is Jesus Himself. The true value in Christ surpasses human imagination, and thus the feeling of possessing a heavenly treasure in Jesus frees us from unnecessary demands and the feeling of inner emptiness. But whoever does not know true joy through Jesus will be receptive to purchasable advertising promises and seek purchasable happiness. But this does not give inner peace.

And even if the worldly person buys all imaginable goods with a lottery win and realizes all worldly dreams and goals, they will consequently despair. For their soul is damaged by material greed. As long as the human heart is greedy, people will not be able to recognize the immense immaterial wealth to be found in a relationship with God and will therefore be unhappy. And so the worldly person notices that no inner peace reigns within them.

The world, however, blinds the worldly person with the delusion that even inner peace and inner tranquility can be bought, e.g., through dream trips. But even the most beautiful dream vacation home, which in any case does not exist forever, will offer no rest and refuge from inner stress and troubles. Only in God do we find refuge from everything that troubles

us, for every human soul needs true refreshment instead of any purchasable things and purchasable distractions, which are only substitute gratifications. The human soul finds this only by getting to know God and turning to Him. Therefore, Jesus invites us to come to Him with the following words: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Jesus, according to His words, wants to free us from all toil to refresh our souls. In Jesus, we can recharge our life force and breathe a sigh of relief because He grants us a dignified and fulfilling life and heals us after we are inwardly broken. This is also shown by the story of the prodigal son. The prodigal son led an undignified life and arrived at the father, who represents God, soiled with dirt and dirty clothes. The father gave him new clothes and a new dignity. This means: God will raise us up after an inner self-breakdown and will not push us away if we come to Him, which is why it is prophesied about Jesus: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him... A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice." So Jesus urged people to come to Him so that He could give us a new future with God that is for our good. But as earnestly as Jesus meant this offer and urgently encouraged to accept it, so little does He allow His goodness and grace to be mocked.

Whoever believes that Jesus' grace would allow a sinful life according to worldly ideas of freedom wants to abuse His goodness and incurs the wrath of God. Thus, all who believe they can abuse God's grace for a dissolute life corresponding to the worldly concept of freedom are mistaken. Peter explicitly warned against this, saying about such people that they promise freedom and are themselves slaves of corruption. So Peter wrote: "For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved" (2 Peter 2:18-19).

We read a similar admonition in the Epistle of Jude (not the Judas who betrayed Jesus): "For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4). Paul wrote about the false idea of freedom of the worldly person: "For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:6, 13). So it applies: "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8). In 1 Peter 2:15-17 we read a similar admonition: "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a

cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."

Paul summarized the above verses by saying that Christian freedom must not be understood as a cloak for selfishness and thus must not serve as an excuse for sin. Another Bible passage clarifies this: "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' They answered him, 'We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?' Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be really free'" (John 8:31-35). Jesus said in this passage that a child of God who lives under the dominion of Jesus is free because they remain in God's Word and therefore may live eternally (in contrast to the slave of sin). Christian freedom thus ends where the Word of God is transgressed.

Christian freedom thus binds us to the Word of God as to Jesus, for both form a unity, as Jesus is the living Word of God. Jesus internalizes the Word of God in our hearts by giving us a new, loving heart. And it is the natural law of love to remain in the Word of God. James called the commandment of love the **royal law of freedom**, because love leads us into spiritual freedom to do God's will out of voluntary surrender of the heart. Thus we experience the meaning of Christian freedom. We can then say: "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). With this, we have already reached the goal of our freedom if we live out the life in Christ that we simply receive as a gift of faith. While the world claims that freedom, happiness, and a meaning in life must be found and fought for outside of God in oneself, and defines happiness only in transient values and false desires, Jesus gives us a perfect and eternal happiness in God that merely requires a turning to God.

In summary: Many yearn for pleasures and values of the world such as power, career, fame, and money, because the world deceives us into believing that not God is the true life goal leading to freedom, but that we only achieve freedom and human dignity through achievement, career, money, and pleasures. But these worldly values in truth serve to devalue our true destiny and identity in God, who loves us independently of our human successes and human abilities and desires nothing more than a relationship with us. If we know God, we can detach ourselves from material aspirations, ideas of self-realization through career or selfish desires, and find an inner liberation from all worries and troubles. Instead of building our self-esteem and seeking our happiness in a so-called self-realization, we rejoice under Christian freedom that we have a new life in Jesus and, thanks to Jesus, are allowed to live in a relationship with God.

Jesus also promised to give us true life in abundance and referred to the spiritual blessings and riches that are exalted above all human goals. He also breaks the chains that bind us to the world and make us unfree, by

freeing us from addictions and compulsions that come from our inner bondage to sin. Thus, He cuts the bond of sin that makes us slaves of the world and unfree, so that we obey Him. A beautiful image illustrating this fact can be found in the book of Daniel. Daniel and other men refused idol worship out of obedience to God and were condemned to be burned in a fiery furnace. By a divine miracle, they remained completely unharmed. Their clothes did not even have the smell of fire. Only the fetters burned in the fiery furnace, for God loosens all chains of captivity when we submit to Him and obey Him. The greatest freedom we can have, therefore, consists in being a servant of Christ. Thereby Jesus' words are fulfilled: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be truly free." Christian freedom means, therefore, turning to the one who truly can and wants to make us free and is trustworthy: namely, God, who is one with Jesus.

The Meaning of the Ceremonial Law Compared to the Moral Law

Some theologians say that the Bible can be divided into eras, and that the Old Covenant, after the promulgation of the 10 Commandments, was the **Age of the Law**, which finds its end in Jesus. They believe that under Jesus, the **Age of Grace** began, and with it, God's Law was abolished. They think that the God of the New Testament Himself no longer takes His commandments seriously when we live under grace. Therefore, they have a problem with the **Sermon on the Mount**, which shows that God's commandments *do* apply under Jesus; and indeed, they are meant to be understood even better in Jesus than was ever possible before. After all, the Sermon on the Mount is often counted as belonging to the "Age of the Law" to maintain the theory that under Jesus, the Age of Grace began, which replaces the Age of the Law. Many theologians, therefore, do not take the narrow path very seriously. They believe that the Sermon on the Mount is only meant to show how difficult and humanly impossible it is to fulfill God's Law according to Jesus' will. From this, they conclude that they can only hope for cheap grace that saves on the broad path of the world.

So they believe that in the New Covenant, humanity is justified by an all-reconciling grace, and that keeping the commandments was the goal and purpose of the Old Covenant. They think that the God of the New Covenant, on the other hand, would not value the keeping of His commandments. They claim that grace would contradict the keeping of the commandments. Allegedly, Christians would therefore fall from grace if they wanted to live according to the guidelines of the 10 Commandments. They draw a dividing line between Law and Grace and say that the commandments are abolished in the New Covenant, and therefore only faith in Jesus counts in the New Covenant. They forget that **faith in Jesus, according to Scripture, goes hand in hand with keeping the commandments**, as God Himself has promised that He will change us under grace in the sense of the Sermon on the Mount, and fulfill His commandments in us. Therefore, no lawless people enter the Kingdom of God. That's why Jesus could tell the rich young man that he would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven if he did not keep God's commandments. The guidelines of the Law have, therefore, not changed in the New Covenant. God said to the people of Israel: "You are my people forever if you keep my commandments." Today, the commandments apply to spiritual Israel. Even today, God tells us through the New Testament in John 8:31: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples."

Many, however, say that God has given up His commandments because in the New Testament we are not justified by keeping the commandments,

and only through God's grace do we receive blessing. To this, one can say: Yes, we are saved by grace and therefore not justified by keeping the commandments, but that certainly does not mean that we are allowed to transgress the commandments. In both the Old and New Covenants, we have no blessing and salvation if we do not conform to God's Law, because even in the New Covenant, it says that **only the doer is righteous before God**. Through Jesus, the demand of the Law has therefore not changed. What God saw as sin in the Old Testament (disobedience, violation of the 10 Commandments), God still considers sin today. His attitude in the New Testament is not: "Live as you want. Now you have grace. You are now free from my annoying moral demands to transgress them with impunity. Grace sanctifies you in sin and rebellion against my holy word." No, the God of the New Testament says: "I expect you to live according to my ordinances. This should happen out of my grace." Keeping God's commandments is not a precondition for salvation, but a **consequence of salvation**, and is brought about by God Himself.

One might then object that in the Old Covenant, God demanded the keeping of His commandments and promised blessing for it, while in the New Covenant, blessing comes from God's grace. Is faith then a substitute for obedience? No, for God has always demanded obedience, and still demands it in the New Covenant, and thus there is no reason to consider God's commandments obsolete and to regard faith in Jesus as a substitute for obedience. In this respect, it is nonsense that theologians dismiss the Old Covenant as purely a covenant of law and portray the New Covenant as a covenant that promises grace at the expense of the law. Moreover, the 10 Commandments of God were intended as a **touchstone for a true relationship with God** in the Old Covenant.

God promised to guide the people of Israel according to these commandments if they completely entrusted themselves to Him. God did not say that the Israelites would find Him by keeping the 10 Commandments. Rather, God expected the keeping of His commandments out of faith. Thus, God never said to the people of Israel: "Either trust in God or keep my commandments," but rather He said that He demands both because both belong together. Isaiah already said, "If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all," for **righteousness before God always comes from faith**. And this already applied to the people of Israel in the Old Testament. The statement that the Israelites were redeemed not by faith but solely by keeping the commandments is therefore incorrect. This statement completely misinterprets the role of the Law, as God never said: "Here you have a bunch of rules, and now you don't need me anymore. You now know what is righteous in my eyes. Live accordingly, so that you are justified."

God never gave the Law to make people righteous by virtue of commandments on stone tablets, but **because of sin**. The Law in the Old Covenant did not fulfill the function of sanctifying the people of Israel. Rather, the Law in the Old Covenant fulfilled the function of a **guardian** who was supposed to restrain the people of Israel from lawlessness

through external "coercion." The Law had the purpose of an overseer who explains to immature children what fatal consequences their wrong behaviors have, and forcibly prevents them from wandering astray. The Law was meant to show Israel how far it was from God and to help the people of Israel find God. It was a warning sign and warned the people of Israel against sin, like a guardian warns immature children against foolishness and threatens them with punishments. The Mosaic Law thus had an **educational function** and regulated punishments for the disregard of the spiritual law, and was meant to provide the people of Israel access to God again through atonement for sins.

The stone tablets with the 10 Commandments alone could not make the people of Israel righteous and did not serve the self-salvation of the Israelites. An Israelite had to involve God in their life to be justified. The Law was supposed to help them with this. The goal of the Law was to bring the people of Israel onto the right path with God. The Law was supposed to keep the people of Israel in their bounds and show them how much they depended on God, so that Israel would turn to God again. It was supposed to bring about that Israel would submit to God out of humility, so that God would rule over the people of Israel. God had to force the people of Israel to humility by imposing the guardian of the Law on them, and so God also humbled His people through the harsh penal law to deter from sin and to curb sin. Otherwise, the people of Israel would have completely fallen away from God. God used the Law not only to restrain and educate the rebellious people of Israel from sin by means of punishments. Its primary purpose was to show the people of Israel what sin actually is, and thereby it was meant to draw attention to God's high demand, or to make sin recognizable.

God did not give the Mosaic Law because He had a short-term preference for laws in the Old Testament. The Law was only meant to help people lead a moral life by fulfilling **3 important functions**. It fulfilled the function of **control**.

It was like an overseer and was supposed to protect from drifting into sin, if necessary by force. It was thus supposed to prevent rebellion by showing the fatal consequences of sin, so that the people of Israel would shrink back from rebellion and submit to God. So it was a kind of educator for the people of Israel (guardian) and served as a **standard (mirror)**. The third function of the Mosaic Law consisted in the **atonement of sins through animal sacrifices**. The Law was thus an important means to protect Israel from falling into total sin. The Law, therefore, did not replace faith in the Old Covenant with the motto: "Do this or that, and you have earned heaven." Therefore, it applies: Humans have always been justified by faith. Certainly, God in the Old Testament made the demand: "Keep my commandments," and He also excluded salvation without keeping the commandments, for God always expected **obedient faith**. In the New Testament, this is no different. Now many say that in the New Testament, we are free from many regulations that God demanded in the Old Testament.

These include countless regulations that were connected with the temple service. Of course, God at that time in the Old Testament demanded that Israel follow many rules that are fulfilled today in Jesus through His sacrifice. In this respect, the sacrificial law in the Old Testament fulfilled the function of providing **access to God**, for the Ceremonial Law foreshadowed the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, without which we have no access to God. The Ceremonial Law showed how important keeping the commandments is to God, for it clarified that the disregard of the commandments led to a broken relationship with God, and humanity was under the curse of sin until they brought a sacrifice to God. The Law of God in the Old Testament thus regulated many provisions that had to be observed to obtain forgiveness and to please God. However, faith in God also represented the **true key to a relationship with God** in the Old Covenant, which was supposed to lead to true obedience out of love.

The Law thus shows **God's demand**, while **faith** serves to enable people to do God's will. God also did not demand the observance of rules for the sake of the Law in the Old Testament, but He also taught the commandment of love under Moses as the meaning and purpose of the entire Law. And thus it becomes clear that already in the Old Covenant, the entire moral law was meant to come into play in a spiritual way, and all commandments refer to God Himself. The observance of many external commandments that were part of ritual sacrifice in the Old Covenant could not redeem or obtain God's favor if it was not done for God's glory or not with regard to God. For this reason, God Himself found burnt offerings abhorrent, which He Himself had commanded, if they did not come from true willingness to repent. God, therefore, did not want a hard-hearted legalism, but a relationship with the people of Israel.

He demanded that His people trust Him and submit to Him. He promised: "If you trust me and therefore submit to me, you will live according to my commandments, for they aim at divine righteousness and automatically come into play in a relationship with God." Exactly the same promise also applies in the New Covenant. However, this covenant is sealed with the blood of Jesus, because the sacrificial death of Jesus is to establish a relationship with God, so that people voluntarily submit to God. For the sacrifice of Jesus is to free from rebellious sin in place of animal sacrifices, to restore humanity's divine image, and thereby to build a bridge to God. The difference between the Old and New Covenants is, therefore, that **through God's grace, we are completely transformed, and no atonement by the blood of animal sacrifices is necessary**. This makes it possible for us to become obedient to God out of grace. It is important to understand: Our obedience should not condition grace, but vice versa. In the New Covenant, the demand of the Law is to be fulfilled through grace. In the Old Covenant, God's moral law was also to be fulfilled by God's power.

However, this was hardly possible, as the people of Israel were alienated from God through sin, and animal sacrifices could not create sufficient atonement to completely free from sin. And thus the people of Israel

perceived God's Law as a heavy burden, as they sinned much and also had to observe many complicated rules for atonement. Thus, God's moral law was already meant to draw attention to the people of Israel's need for redemption and to show God's people that they needed divine righteousness. With the 10 Commandments, God wanted to show His people how they should lead a life set apart for God, to which Christ frees us.

The first 4 commandments on the first tablet of the Law demand to love God, and the other six on the second tablet demand to love one's neighbor, and keeping the tablets of the Law, which happens through love, guarantees eternal life. God said about the 10 Commandments: "Whoever lives by them is righteous." Paul referred to this statement in Galatians 3:12 when he said: "The one who does them will live, the one who does not do them will not live." Then he pointed out that we naturally do not meet this demand, while Jesus connected this demand with His love, which He gives us through His grace. Jesus preached exactly the first and second tablets of the Law in many situations, as He summarized the entire Law in the double commandment of love. Thus, the 10 Commandments show how we should live and how we will live if we completely turn to God. This turning to God should happen by submitting to Jesus and living under grace, for thereby we live under God's dominion, which automatically fulfills God's commandments. That God's dominion is the key to the 10 Commandments is already shown by the heading of the Law. The Law begins with the statement: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt." The 10 Commandments thus remind in the preamble that God deserves honor for freeing the Israelites from their slavery. This makes it clear: The living God enters into a relationship with us, He cares for us. And to emphasize this, it says on the tablet of the Law, which was originally addressed to earthly Israel: "I have freed you from the house of slavery."

At the beginning of the Mosaic Law, there is not the statement: "Live according to my commandments, so that I become your God." Rather, we read: "If I am your God, I will set you free, then you will keep my commandments and salvation and blessing will follow from that." God gave the 10 Commandments as both commandments and promises. He gave the 10 Commandments with the note that these commandments must be observed so that we have salvation and blessing. At the same time, He gave the commandments as promises of faith on the condition that we recognize God as our Lord and serve Him alone, or recognize His strength and rely on Him. Strictly speaking, the original text does not necessarily say: "You shall!", but: "You will!" (One can translate "You will" just as well from the original text as "You shall"). If we read the commandments not as "You shall," but as "You will," it becomes particularly clear: If we revere God as the Ruler of the universe and submit to Him, we will keep His commandments. The one who is freed by God from all sinful impulses lives voluntarily according to His will. Therefore, God could say: "If you keep my commandments, you are my people," for the commandments automatically result from the relationship between God and humanity. And the relationship with God lost through

sin is to be restored through grace, thereby bringing humanity into conformity with God and His will, which is expressed in His Law.

Law and grace are therefore in a context and not in a contradiction, especially since grace serves a relationship with God, from which obedience, salvation, and blessing follow. Even in the Old Covenant, blessing and salvation were to depend on a relationship with God. The keeping of the commandments, therefore, also in the Old Covenant was not to precede the relationship with God, but to characterize a relationship with God. The commandments tell us solely through the preamble: "Because I am your God, who has freed you, you will not murder, commit adultery, run after other gods, you do not need to steal the things of others, etc." This sentence is meant to make us understand that a relationship with God brings true inner righteousness and conditions all moral commandments of the 10 Commandments.

Now there are further misconceptions about the 10 Commandments. A common misconception is that all who do not naturally belong to Israel are "free" from God's 10 Commandments, as they were never given a written law. So many say that the 10 Commandments were not valid before Moses and were limited only to Israel, as God gave the 10 Commandments to no other people than Israel at Mount Sinai. Many are probably of the opinion that God's commandments only came into force when God wrote them on stone tablets and they were communicated in writing.

But this opinion makes no sense, for God already judged people before Moses on the basis of His commandments. God's commandments are an expression of God's eternally valid righteousness, even before God handed over the stone tablets. When Joseph was tempted in Egypt to commit adultery with his master's wife, he kept the commandment "You shall not commit adultery" (Genesis 39:7-10). These commandments were not yet written down but were well known through oral tradition. It is said of Abraham that he "obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:5). But these commandments, statutes, and laws were not recorded until Moses did so (see Exodus 20-23), and they also became part of the covenant between God and the nation of Israel. Cain, the first murderer, knew when he killed his brother Abel that he had broken the commandment "You shall not kill." Paul also gives further arguments for the eternal validity of the 10 Commandments. If God's Law had not been in force before Moses, then God could neither accuse nor punish sin from Adam's Fall until Moses, for after all, without a law, no sin can exist. Thus, in the time when there was no written law, there would also have been no death, for sin, according to Scripture, is a transgression of the law, and death is the wages of sin.

However, Paul emphasized in Romans 2 that since Adam's Fall until Moses, sin and death already prevailed, and God could not overlook sin. According to Paul, God gave God's Law because of sin, or to make sin recognizable. So under Moses, according to Paul, it was added "because

of transgressions." By this, Paul did not mean that God's commandments were not in force before. He referred to the tablets of the Law, as before Moses no law existed in written form. Thus, he referred to the Gentile nations as nations without a law, for Israel was the only nation that received a law from God. Thus, Israel was directly called upon to keep God's Law, while no law was given to the Gentile nations, and thus God promised them neither blessing for keeping the commandments nor curse for disregarding them. But this does not mean that we are allowed to disregard God's Law if we are not Israelites.

God's commandments have always been universally valid. Otherwise, an unbelieving Gentile would have a license to steal, murder, commit adultery, etc. They could say before God's throne after their death: "I never received a stone tablet law with the 10 Commandments. I was never placed under a law. Therefore, I have an excuse that I lived in sin." That means a Gentile would be justified even without Jesus and would not have to fear hell because they live in sin. The Bible, however, says that everyone who does not believe in Jesus is condemned. Paul also said in Romans 2 that the Gentile nations will be held accountable for their sins, even if they never received a literal written law from God. Finally, God reveals His will to us through the Bible and the Gospel and writes the commandments in our hearts when we turn to Him. So we cannot say that our sins are justified because God only gave the Law to Israel and not to all peoples. For God's spiritual Law has never been restricted to Israel alone and is an eternal ordinance of God. It was valid before Moses, and also Gentiles were never allowed to murder, steal, commit adultery, despise God, etc. Before God, therefore, all people are equal, and according to Paul, there is no partiality with God.

An Israelite is not justified because they are a Jew or know and teach God's Law. Rather, it is hypocrisy to teach the Law but not to agree with it in the heart. Thus, Jesus already said to the Pharisees that God does not judge by outward appearance but looks into the heart. He was referring to their false religiosity regarding the Law. Their knowledge of the Law did not make them righteous before God, but hypocrites. So, according to Paul, it does not benefit our justification if we know the Law but do not act according to it. Paul said in essence: "If you, as an eager teacher of the Law, teach the Law and do not act according to the Law, then you are guilty. Why do you not teach yourself and consider yourself righteous because you, as a Jew, know the Law? By judging the other, you judge yourself, for you do not abide by the commandments and demand it of others. What matters is that God's Law is written in your heart. If the Law is written in the heart, people act according to God's commandments, even if they do not know God's Law or were never instructed in God's Law." From this, it becomes clear that God's Law is universally valid and binding, regardless of whether we have received a written law from God or not, for in the end, God judges our heart and we must give an account of our deeds according to our conscience.

God's Law, therefore, did not become binding for the Israelites only when God obligated the Israelites to keep the commandments by writing them

on stone tablets and handing them to Moses. The stone tablets with the 10 Commandments were only meant to clarify the already given moral duties. God's righteousness, which finds expression in His Law, is unchangeable, and so are His demands on us.

Thus, all people are responsible from birth to keep the 10 Commandments, and so they rest on us as demands from birth. But Jesus can take away the burden of the Law's demands if we come under His grace. His Spirit realizes the 10 Commandments in us under grace, so that they no longer weigh on us as an unfulfillable obligation. We should therefore understand: When Paul said that the Christian is not under the yoke of the Law, he did not say that the commandments are invalid through the New Covenant with Jesus. Rather, he meant that **in Jesus, the commandments become promises**. Jesus said: "Whoever receives me receives the Father," and thus through grace, we accept God as our Lord. Thereby, the 10 Commandments become alive in us, because God enters our lives and realizes them in us. In this way, we become righteous, for only the doer of the Law is righteous according to Scripture. So under grace, the commandments are not placed on us as an unfulfillable obligation, because Jesus has promised to fulfill and internalize the Law Himself if we trust Him. Thus, the Law is no longer a guardian for us.

It has fulfilled the pedagogical effect of an educator who threatens us with a raised index finger because we are going astray. Whoever has grown up no longer needs a babysitter. You don't have to tell an adult: "Woe to you if you cross the street on red." The adult crosses the street on green not out of fear of punishment, but out of reason. Likewise, the Law does not play the role of a guardian for us if we are under the guidance of Jesus. So we obey the Law in Jesus because we are spiritually grown up. Thus, our obedience does not happen through external coercion, but in a spiritual way. The Bible, therefore, teaches that through the heart of the New Covenant, we are in conformity with God's commandments and therefore, due to inner maturity, adhere to the commandments. Here the difference between the Old and New Covenants becomes clear. The Old Covenant could not bring people to the goal (in conformity with God), because no one can keep the commandments without Jesus. However, since the Law finds its true fulfillment in Jesus, the New Covenant brings us into absolute conformity with God. The Old Covenant could not write the Law into hearts and therefore served only as a temporary order.

Therefore, according to Paul, the Old Covenant is replaced by a better New Order. This means that we are only obligated to the spiritual Law of the 10 Commandments. It is often said: If God considers the Ceremonial Law obsolete today, does that not apply to the 10 Commandments as well? No, only the 10 Commandments were in the Ark of the Covenant, for all other regulations were only necessary to ensure purity from sin and aimed at the atonement of sins, which Jesus has done. The **Ceremonial Law**, which consisted of many regulations, is **not part of**

the Ten Commandments. The difference between the Moral Law and the Ceremonial Law is clear. The Moral Law shows us God's righteousness, which is reality in Jesus. But Israel could not keep the Law (the 10 Commandments) and was thus under God's wrath, and so the Ceremonial Law became necessary to atone for the transgressions of the spiritual law. The Ceremonial Law is a completely different matter than the Moral Law, as it had a different function. The Bible shows that the laws regarding animal sacrifices and burnt offerings were originally not part of the Old Covenant (Jeremiah 7:21-23). These laws were later added "because of transgressions" (Galatians 3:19).

The Ceremonial Law was tied to an earthly temple, which no longer exists today, and consisted of symbols that pointed to Christ's sacrifice and His priesthood. And it was instituted with the words: "This is the law of the burnt offering, of the grain offering, of the sin offering, of the guilt offering, of the consecration offering, and of the peace offerings" (Leviticus 7:37). These sacrifices were to apply until a better order was instituted (see Hebrews 9:8-10) and therefore no longer apply in the New Covenant. Only the old covenant required the precise observance of regulations for the atonement of guilt, as the perfect sacrifice of Jesus had not yet been fulfilled (e.g., the priests had to qualify themselves for the sacrificial service and a flawless animal had to be sacrificed). However, the sacrifices of the Old Covenant do not sufficiently lead to atonement, but only brought about a reduction of guilt and an extension of God's patience with His rebellious people.

We learn from Hebrews 9: In the earthly temple, gifts and animal sacrifices were offered. But they could not completely reconcile with God and grant a good conscience. The purity regulations also did not produce true inner cleansing, even if they were necessary for the temple service and therefore had to be carried out for the sacrificial service and were therefore important. They concerned regulations that regulated external life. It was about regulations regarding eating and drinking or certain cleansing regulations. These ordinances were valid only until God put the new order into effect. Jesus' sacrifice cleanses us "from within" better than the animal sacrifices at that time, without additional purity regulations being necessary for the cleansing of sin (see: "But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11ff.)).

Through the one sacrifice of Jesus, we thus have access to God, and this leads directly into the Most Holy Place of the temple, because Jesus' sacrifice completely removes sin, which animal sacrifices only partially accomplished. Through Jesus, all purity regulations and all other sacrifices are superfluous. The regulations for temple service therefore only made sense until Jesus, with His sacrifice, completely opened the way to God. The curtain of the temple tore at the crucifixion, which separated the Most Holy Place of the temple, where humanity could meet

God. The earthly temple, to which the Ceremonial Law was bound, is, according to Hebrews 9, no longer necessary since that time, because the true temple of God is spiritual and is to be found in Jesus. The Bible therefore reveals that God's moral law is an eternal order, but that through the institution of a new order, the priesthood and thus the Ceremonial Law have changed (Hebrews 7:12). And so, in the New Covenant, we do not need a high priest who performs atonement in an earthly temple in the form of animal sacrifices, for Jesus is the High Priest of the new order, who offers Himself as a perfect sacrifice.

Thus, the ritual laws are not dissolved in their order, but fulfilled in Jesus. Or rather: In Jesus, the provisions of the ritual purity regulations find their perfect fulfillment, which even goes beyond what the ritual ceremonies could achieve. As a perfect and sinless High Priest, He thus replaces the high priests of the Old Covenant. Since the priesthood was changed through Christ, a change in the Law was also necessary: "For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well" (Hebrews 7:12). Which law is addressed here? The law that was changed was, on the one hand, the law that limited the priesthood to the descendants of Levi. On the other hand, the laws that related to the ritual sacrifices were changed. The Levites offered sacrifices daily, but Jesus Christ offered one sacrifice for all time: "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). Therefore, the priesthood has been eternally transferred to the Son of God according to the order of Melchizedek.

Paul explained why the sacrificial law had to be changed to introduce a better order through the New Covenant. The reason was that the Old Covenant could not bring about perfection, and therefore did not fulfill God's will due to the insufficient atoning power of animal sacrifices. Paul said this in the following words in Hebrews 9: "Thus the former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God." (Note: because it probably could not permanently deter from sin). The Law (meaning specifically the Ceremonial Law in this context) was unable to lead to perfection.

The reason was that the Old Covenant could not bring about perfection, and therefore did not fulfill God's will due to the insufficient atoning power of animal sacrifices. Paul states this in the following words in Hebrews 9: "Thus the former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (note: because it probably could not permanently deter from sin); the law (meaning in this context the Ceremonial Law in particular) was unable to lead to perfection. In place of that order, something has come that gives us a hope that overshadows everything before it, and that makes unhindered access to God possible (meaning Christ's work of redemption)." The New Covenant, according to these words, is intended to lead to perfection and at the same time replace the old order with its animal sacrifices through the sacrifice of Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount explains to us that we achieve this perfection if we keep God's

commandments with all our hearts, because we observe not only the letter of the commandments, but also their spirit. The change in the law, which served to introduce the better order, therefore, according to Paul, refers solely to the **Ceremonial Law** which was the basis for temple service. The **10 Commandments**, on the other hand, are **unchangeable**, and therefore they were on stone tablets in contrast to the Ceremonial Law. They were written with the fingers of God on stone (even twice). Moses had to go up the mountain specifically to receive these stone tablets. The 10 Commandments were placed in the Ark of the Covenant under the mercy seat. The Ark of the Covenant with the mercy seat in the earthly sanctuary was a symbol of God's throne, of which it is said: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever" (Psalm 45:7). This also indicates the eternity of this law. Of the 10 Commandments it is said: God added nothing to them (see Deuteronomy 5:19 [22]). This proves that the Ceremonial Laws are not an extension of the 10 Commandments or the moral law, but only a symbol pointing to Jesus and His redemptive act.

All of God's ordinances must therefore be viewed with regard to Jesus, especially since they aim at the righteousness of Jesus. Through Jesus, the commandments are to be fulfilled in a deeper sense, so that we no longer cling to the literal wording of the law, but internalize the commandments in their full meaning and live accordingly. That is why it is absurd to assume that Jesus would abolish the Law or weaken its meaning, especially since the commandments were proclaimed as an eternal law. Before God named the 10 Commandments, He said that His people should learn His commandments as long as they live on earth and thus until Jesus' return (see Deuteronomy 4:5f.): "See, I [Moses] have taught you statutes and rules, as Yahweh, my God, commanded me, that you may do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who hear all these statutes. And they will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people!' For what great nation has a god so near to it as Yahweh our God is to us in all that we call upon him for? And what great nation has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children—how on the day that you stood before Yahweh your God at Horeb (Sinai), when Yahweh said to me, 'Assemble the people to me, that I may let them hear my [Father's] words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children!'"

The 10 Commandments are, according to the Bible, an expression of God's eternal righteousness. The Ceremonial Law, on the other hand, foreshadowed Jesus' work of redemption, for it contained atonement regulations, and for that, ritual laws were necessary. In the Old Covenant, this included countless cleansing regulations that were indispensable for temple service and atonement. These are no longer binding. One can say that the sacrificial regulations and cleansing rituals for temple service

merely foreshadowed the **inner cleansing** that Jesus gives us through His grace. In the New Testament, it is about the fulfillment of the commandments in a **spiritual sense**, which is why the New Covenant is about the spiritual law and no longer about the Ceremonial Law. To obey the spiritual law of purity means more than to keep oneself clean in a ceremonial way. The New Testament tells us: One tried to wash his hands in innocence and yet became and remained guilty (Matthew 27:24). Washing his hands did Pilate no good. Only Jesus' blood truly cleanses (1 John 1:7). Purity in the New Testament is attained by receiving Jesus, the Word of God, into ourselves, without having to observe ritual commandments. According to the Bible, we are already pure for the sake of the Word (John 15:3), that is, through the inner acceptance of Jesus' word. In conclusion, one can say: The New Covenant is based on the shed blood of Jesus, which brings about a perfect atonement for guilt and can even make us perfect through one sacrifice, as Paul wrote in Hebrews. This sacrifice finally creates a **clear conscience**, because the sinner's guilt is thus paid for once and for all if they live and remain in God's grace. The Mosaic Covenant, which prescribes the forgiveness of sins through animal sacrifices, was therefore abolished for a better covenant, which was sealed with the blood of the Messiah. The New Covenant serves the **true fulfillment of the Law** by truly leading people back to God. From the beginning, the Bible thus shows us that grace and the New Covenant aim at keeping the commandments, which are to be accomplished through God or a true relationship with God.

Therefore, it is a false claim that God in the Old Testament demanded the keeping of the commandments and in the New Testament offers grace instead, or that faith in Jesus contradicts the keeping of the commandments. On the contrary, God's grace is connected with obedience. We already learn in the Old Testament that God's favor or grace applies to those who live in **obedient faith**, or that grace is never disconnected from so-called obedient faith. We read of people in the Old Testament who found favor with God because they believed in God and were obedient to Him, and so God's grace is not a New Testament concept that replaces God's demand for obedience, for **grace, faith, and obedience belong together**. Therefore, for the redeemed, the Bible verse from Nehemiah applies: "but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Jesus and the Jewish Feasts

God commanded His people Israel to celebrate certain feasts. The feasts consist of ordinances that point to the act of salvation and also include future events in salvation history. The question now is what role they play, because Jesus never explicitly commanded us to observe them. Many believe that Jesus therefore never considered these feasts important, even though He meticulously observed them. Others say that Jesus considered them important for Himself as a Jew, but abolished them

for all people with the cross. Still others say that they would only apply to Israel because they were given to Israel. And many ask whether the feasts from Moses should be observed at all in the New Covenant, since they do not belong to the spiritual moral law of the 10 Commandments and play a special role. Others, in turn, say that the feast days cannot be separated from the 10 Commandments, since according to James, the entire Law of God is a unit.

They claim that the Old Testament ordinances of the feast days form a unit with the spiritual law. The very impossibility for Gentiles to keep the feasts is seen by them as proof of the abolition of the Law. After all, as Gentiles, we should have the same chance of salvation as the Israelites. However, to assume that Jesus abolished the Law is absurd. Jesus Himself said that He did not want to abolish the Law. Nevertheless, the question of whether Jesus abolished the feasts is justified, because no Gentile Christian will observe them according to the Old Testament ordinance, because this would hardly be feasible. And in a certain sense, they must still apply, because Jesus said that He would not abolish a single jot of the Law. However, with regard to the regulations of the Ceremonial Law, it is clear that Jesus made certain commandments superfluous for us. Through His sacrifice, Jesus brought the Ceremonial Law to its perfect fulfillment, so that it does not bind us, even as Israelites. The regulations of the Ceremonial Law were fulfilled in Jesus, and thus He invalidated the ritual law from our perspective, without abolishing it in its deeper meaning. In this respect, one could assume that the feasts of God, which Jesus already fulfilled with His saving act, are fulfilled in Him for us, and no longer need to concern us, even as Israelites. After all, except for the spiritual commandments, the laws from the Old Testament were a transitional regulation and were only to be observed until they were fulfilled in Jesus. Could it be that Jesus observed God's feasts to fulfill them in their deeper meaning, and that they are therefore meaningless for us from our perspective?

On the other hand, the complete fulfillment of all feast activities by Jesus has not yet taken place, because some feasts are still outstanding. In this sense, the feasts that are still outstanding are necessarily binding, at least for a Messianic Israelite. However, it must be considered that many laws from the Old Testament have a symbolic and shadowy meaning, which fulfilled their purpose with the first coming of Jesus. And if all the feasts that Jesus has fulfilled and still wants to fulfill are shadows that refer to Him, we should no longer cling to these shadows. For with all the laws of the Old Testament that are shadows of Jesus, only the symbolic content was important, which finds its living correspondence in Jesus, which is better than the shadow. Thus, the appearance of Jesus as Messiah brings with it the living reality of Old Testament commandments. He thereby replaces the shadow of these commandments. After all, a shadow only draws an outline in the form of a blurred contour.

The shadow of a person only sketches the living reality of a person and is only an image of them. When one has a living person, the shadow of that person has served its purpose. Then one not only knows the contour of

the person, but can get to know them in their essence and form an idea of them. So we should also cling to the living person Jesus and not seek Him in shadows, which were a foreshadowing of Him as Messiah before His first coming. That is why many laws from the Old Testament are no longer binding for Christians, because their symbolic content has served its purpose. In other words, one could say: Many laws in the Old Covenant were meant to express in shadowy form a reality that is spiritualized through the first coming of Jesus in His living person. Thus, with regard to Jesus, they are not abolished, but moved into the spiritual. They find their true purpose in the spiritual. Herein lies the answer to the question of how we should classify God's feasts, because on the one hand they cannot be completely abolished, and on the other hand it is certainly not commanded for us to celebrate them according to the Old Testament rules. The Bible tells us the following: Through Jesus, the feasts of God are not simply abolished; through Him, the meaning of the feasts is moved into the spiritual. This happens, for example, by many festive activities, such as the slaughter of the Passover lamb, finding their fulfillment in Jesus as the sacrificed Lamb of God.

Furthermore, I would like to note: I myself think that the feasts of God, as they were ordained in Moses, applied to the Israelites, and we as Gentiles were never called upon to observe them according to these ordinances. But for us as spiritual Israel, the feasts also concern their spiritual and salvific historical meaning, and we should understand what these ordinances mean, or how they are to be viewed from today's perspective. For they show us that certain salvation events are to take place on fixed days of the year and that these gatherings are specific dates that refer to Jesus. I would like to outline the meaning of these dates only briefly, as I want to limit myself to the most important things to know.

The sequence of the **7 biblical feasts** contains the complete history of salvation. The **first four feasts** speak of what has already happened historically with the crucifixion and resurrection. They refer to the first coming of Jesus as the suffering Messiah, the resurrection, and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The remaining feasts are the **autumn feasts**. They point to the future that lies ahead of us, to the return of the Lord as the royal Messiah, and what will come afterwards. And since a part of salvation history is fulfilled through Jesus, the Jewish feasts from today's perspective are to be seen from a different viewpoint than in the time of Moses. For example, there were ordained animal sacrifices, e.g., on Yom Kippur in the Old Testament, which are of course already fulfilled in Jesus' sacrifice, just like the slaughter of the Passover lamb at Passover. The Bible tells us that animal sacrifices only made sense until Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice. And so it makes no sense, even for Jews who believe in Jesus as Messiah, to strictly observe the feasts of God according to the Old Testament regulations, because this overlooks the spiritual component: namely, that Jesus perfectly corresponds to the symbolic content of the festive ordinances, and therefore, for example, an animal sacrifice on Yom Kippur makes no sense. (After all, we should acknowledge that Jesus is the perfect

sacrifice, and we need no further sacrifices for the atonement of our guilt).

In this sense, I think that the feasts in the Old Testament only play a role for us as Christians in the **spiritual dimension**, since all of God's ordinances were to be understood symbolically.

I would like to elaborate on how the feasts of the Old Testament have a spiritual meaning, and how Jesus fulfilled them or to what extent He will still fulfill the outstanding autumn feasts. I begin with the feasts that Jesus has already fulfilled. The **first feast is Passover**. At Passover, the Israelites celebrate freedom after the Exodus and commemorate the history of suffering of their people. Various foods recall how the angel of the Lord spared the firstborn of the Israelites before the exodus from Egypt: a lamb bone reminds of the slaughtered lamb, the matzah (unleavened bread) of the quick exodus, the bitter herbs of the hard life in Egypt. The bone must not be broken (Exodus 12:46 - John 19:32-36)! Bitter herbs (horseradish, leek, etc.) remind of the bitter time in Egypt. Salt water is a symbol of the tears of the slaves. Clay food at this feast symbolizes the clay work of the Israelite slaves. A special cup, filled with wine, is also present for the forerunner of the Messiah; it is not drunk from during the celebration.

During the Passover meal, Jesus instituted the **Lord's Supper** and the **New Covenant**. In His death, the Passover feast is fulfilled, because as the sacrificed Passover lamb, He bore our sins (Isaiah 53; John 1:29, 35, 36). Jesus died during the Jewish Passover feast, where the Passover lambs were slaughtered for atonement. John said of Him: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:36). Jesus fulfilled the Passover feast in all criteria and is the perfect Passover lamb sacrifice for the following reasons: The lamb had to be chosen. The lamb had to be flawless (Exodus 12:5). Christ was always perfectly without sin (1 John 3:5). No one could convict Him of sin (see John 8:46). Therefore it is written: "We were ransomed with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). The lamb had to die vicariously. Jesus died in our place for our guilt. The blood of the lamb had to be applied, smeared on the doorposts or sprinkled before the Exodus. In Peter, it also says that we must be sprinkled by the blood of Jesus. We must apply what Jesus has done in faith and claim it. Not all people are automatically saved because Jesus died on the cross, but those who apply this in faith.

The **second feast is the Feast of Unleavened Bread**: For seven days, nothing containing leaven may be eaten, as this is considered unclean and is a sign of sin. Jesus was buried on the 1st day of this feast. Leaven in the Bible is an image of evil, corruption, decay, which spreads everywhere where evil reigns. On the day of His death, Jesus took all our old life, our "leaven," upon Himself. Paul referred to the Feast of Unleavened Bread and emphasized the spiritual component of the feast: "It is not good that you boast. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens

the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

The **third feast is the Feast of Firstfruits**: Exactly on this feast day, Jesus rose from the dead as the "firstfruits from the dead," as 1 Corinthians 15:20 says, when in Israel at that time the Feast of the First Sheaf (barley harvest) was celebrated. Christ is the first offering from the dead for God the Father! When the Israelites brought the first sheaf of grain and presented it to God, it was seen as a sign, pledge, and guarantee that the rest of the harvest would follow. When Christ rose from the dead and ascended to the Father, He offered Himself as the firstfruits, pledge, and surety that the harvest would follow (1 Corinthians 15:23-24). The Feast of Firstfruits is fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus. And that is a pledge, guarantee, and assurance that we too will rise! Not only Jesus lives, but we will follow Him in the great resurrection, the great harvest of God, by finding new life in Him!

The **fourth feast is the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)**. It is the remembrance feast of the giving of the 10 Commandments. The fulfillment of this feast by Jesus on a spiritual level happens through the gift of the Holy Spirit; God's Law comes into the heart. Only then is the Law fulfilled, because it is spiritual and can only be truly understood with a spiritual mind. The Holy Spirit fell on Jesus' disciples exactly on this feast day, writing the Torah, God's Law, into their hearts according to the promise (Ezekiel 36).

The remaining feasts are the **autumn feasts**. In contrast to the feasts described above, they refer to the future.

The first autumn feast is the **Feast of Trumpets**, also called Yom Teruah or Rosh Hashanah. On that day, the shofar horn is blown. It was announced with the following words: "Speak to the children of Israel and say: In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a day of solemn rest, a memorial proclaimed with a blast of trumpets, a holy convocation" (Leviticus 23:24). The divine judgment is "written" on Yom Teruah and "weighed" and "sealed" on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The actual meaning of this feast from Leviticus 23:24 can again be understood by those who await the return of Jesus. For the return of Jesus is announced by an angel with a shofar horn: "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet (shofar) of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). The Feast of Trumpets lasts about 2 days and is known as a feast of which no one knows the day or hour. Jesus said in His eschatological discourse about the signs of His second coming that no one knows the day or hour. This is probably a clear indication that He will come at the Feast of Trumpets. **Yom Kippur** is the next autumn feast and the Great Day of Atonement,

where all repent, for the promised salvation of all Israel (Romans 11:26). It is the holiest day for Jews. Only on this day was the Most Holy Place in the temple allowed to be entered by the High Priest to be particularly close to God there. In the time of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, two goats were sacrificed on Yom Kippur. Believers stay at home on this day, fast, and do no work. The day is entirely dedicated to reflecting on one's own life and faith.

The next feast is the **Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot)**. It refers to the messianic kingdom, in which all nations will pilgrimage to Jerusalem for this very feast (Zechariah 14:16). The kingdom of Jesus is called "the tent of David" in the Bible (Amos 9:11). Jesus will return, and the dwelling of God will be among humanity: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them [literally "tent"]'" (Revelation 21:3). During the Feast of Tabernacles, prayers for rain were offered and water was drawn from the Pool of Siloam. Jesus said at this feast: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive" (John 7:37). The Feast of Tabernacles symbolizes that God dwells with us; the booths symbolically represent our body, which according to the Bible is the spiritual temple in which God dwells when we are united with God through Jesus.

Among the special days are not only the feast days of Moses, but also the **weekly Sabbath**, which, according to the 10 Commandments, is to be kept as the Day of the Lord. I think it is good if Christians keep the Sabbath for God's sake and consciously do nothing on the Sabbath or only do things that require no effort. But of course, we can do something on the Sabbath. Jesus said that we should do good on the Sabbath; our resting on the Sabbath should not be an excuse that we are not even allowed to move to help someone. Jesus kept the Sabbath, but He picked ears of grain on the Sabbath. This was forbidden according to the human commandments of the Pharisees and therefore not a breach of the law. However, one could accuse Jesus of not having rested. But that would be interpreting the Sabbath commandment too narrowly. He said that He had nevertheless not transgressed the Sabbath commandment. For He is Lord of the Sabbath. With this, He declared the Sabbath commandment to be valid, but He clarified that also with this commandment, our **heart's attitude towards God** counts. The Sabbath is to be consecrated to the glory of God and is therefore called the Day of the Lord. However, we should not only honor God and focus on Him on the Sabbath, but every day. But in the hustle and bustle of everyday life, we are distracted and cannot fully reflect on Him.

The Sabbath is fulfilled by freeing ourselves from the hustle and bustle of everyday life on the 7th day of the week, to reflect on God without distractions. Through Jesus, we have access to God and can and should always find inner rest with God. In the world, we may not always be able

to fully experience this rest in the daily work routine. But when we are redeemed from this world, we will always have rest from all earthly things to completely reflect on God. Thus, we may enter into eternal rest when we are redeemed from the world.

Paul spoke of our entering into eternal rest through Jesus if we hold fast to our faith and are obedient to God. For when we are redeemed from this world, we can dedicate ourselves entirely every day to the rest we find in God. This is the goal of the plan of salvation, for sadly, human life has become idle due to the Fall. Before the Fall, man lived a life in the rest of God. After the Fall, God said that man should work by the sweat of his brow because of the curse of sin. Thereby, man was disturbed from eternal rest. In this respect, the main purpose of the Sabbath is not to let oneself be enslaved by one's work, to take a breath, and even under work pressure to say: Only God is important, I can entrust all my worries to Him, and it should be possible to postpone work to the next day. Whoever cannot rest for 6 days due to work will realize that it is best for their own well-being to rest on the seventh day. This rest should be used to fully reflect on God. Certainly, the Sabbath commandment in its interpretation is the most controversial commandment, and I believe that especially the **heart's attitude** counts for this commandment.

I would now like to conclude by saying once again that the feasts of God are not simply abolished. However, it is enough if a Christian sees the **spiritual correspondence of the feasts in Jesus** and reflects on the ordinances and feast days.

I am aware that many say that, according to James, the commandments are to be regarded as a unit and are inseparable. Some lawless antichrists use this to accuse true followers of Jesus of being transgressors of the law because they do not do everything that is in the Law. Allegedly, they are guilty because they want to keep God's Law, even though they cannot observe it in its full extent. (This is the usual slander). They are accused of being just as much transgressors of the law as murderers, thieves, or fornicators, because they do not keep God's feasts according to the instructions of the Old Testament. But to this, it must be said: James was referring to the **spiritual Law** when he said that all the commandments of the Law form a unit. He did not mean that we must observe Old Testament and temporary ordinances (which only cast shadows on Jesus and were not given to Gentiles).

That's why he also said that **mercy is the only thing that triumphs over God's judgment**, the foundation of which is the spiritual Law. The spiritual Law is not about shadows, but about the **reality of our being Christian**, or about the realization of our existence in Christ. Whoever lives in Christ lives in the 10 Commandments, because they walk in them through His love. Thus, it is naturally important to see the 10 Commandments as a unit, because they all describe the righteousness and nature of Jesus. Whoever does not live in Jesus is automatically not a doer of the spiritual Law. And of course, it is not enough to want to fulfill

a single commandment and pick out something from the 10 Commandments. All commandments belong together. So it is not possible to divide the spiritual Law into individual commandments, to pick out some of them to partially fulfill the Law. Jesus himself drew attention to the unity of the Law by counting all commandments as part of the **commandment to love**. Thus, it is clear that James sees the Law as a unit because he sees the demand for love behind every commandment. All commandments of the spiritual Law are therefore important according to his statement and must not be separated from each other.

On the other hand, we should not observe regulations that belonged to the temporary order of the Old Covenant and were considered a shadow. Otherwise, we would disregard the New Covenant and the sacrifice of Jesus. Let's take the temple service as an example. There were different rooms for the temple service, and inside was the holiest area, the so-called Most Holy Place, which was separated by a curtain. The curtain of the earthly temple tore at the crucifixion, which separated the Most Holy Place of the temple from the anteroom of the temple. This symbolizes that the way to God is accessible to all of us through the crucifixion event. Thus, even we as Gentiles are worthy to enter the spiritual temple. This means we do not need an earthly temple in which only earthly priests chosen by God were allowed to enter to bring about atonement. After all, even this temple service did not fully open up true access to God. The Most Holy Place of the temple, which symbolized the presence of God, was therefore separated by a curtain that embodied Jesus' body. (The Most Holy Place, like its anteroom, was accessible only to consecrated persons and not to the general public. Even the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place only once a year on Yom Kippur, while the daily sacrifices took place in the anteroom.)

Jesus is now our High Priest, whose sacrifice opens the way to God for everyone. The regulations of the temple service, which were intended for approaching God, are no longer binding for us through Jesus' sacrifice. Not because Jesus would simply abolish God's Law. But because through His sacrifice, the **perfect fulfillment of the sacrificial service** has taken place. Or rather: In Jesus, the provisions of the ritual purity regulations for sacrificial ceremonies, such as animal sacrifices, find their perfect fulfillment, which even goes beyond what the ritual ceremonies could achieve. So Jesus never simply abolished commandments. However, all commandments must be viewed with regard to Him, and so it is important not to stubbornly follow regulations like the Pharisees. In this sense, it is important to remember that Jesus never lowered the standard of the Law, but simplified it by making the Ceremonial Law superfluous for us through His sacrifice. The Bible says that Jesus did not come to lower the Law, but to make it great. The Old Testament contains many prophecies about the coming of the Messiah and His work. Isaiah 42 contains a prophecy about Christ's teaching on the Law. In verse 1 we read: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations." In verse 4 it says: "He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his

law." The prophet Isaiah prophesied: "He will make the law great and glorious!" (Isaiah 42:21). And to those who think that Jesus simply abolished all commandments and that God's feasts are insignificant, I want to say: If Jesus observed the feasts after His first coming, He will also observe the feasts at His second coming. Jesus died during the Passover feast, was raised from the dead at the Feast of Firstfruits, the atoning sacrifice of Jesus forms the basis of the Day of Atonement (see Hebrews 7-9).

Differences and Similarities Between a Pharisee and Adherents of Cheap Grace

If we look beyond the facade of the Pharisees, it becomes clear that they were lawless and thus, in their attitude, resemble the lawless **adherents of cheap grace**, in contrast to true Christians who have no commonalities with them whatsoever. Pharisees could colloquially be described as having a big mouth, which they used for bragging. But behind their big mouth, there was nothing. They were considered educated and great religious leaders because they boasted extensively about their knowledge of scripture, making them appear wise. They also loved to teach in synagogues and acted as teachers who seemed to know everything better, and their legalistic piety made them appear trustworthy at first glance. Yet, according to Jesus, they were in truth **blind guides** who offered themselves as guides to the blind and led them astray. They portrayed themselves as pious leaders, even corrupting people, according to Jesus, because they taught the Law in a twisted way. So he told them: "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat but swallow a camel! ... You want to lead others, but you yourselves are blind."

So we should understand: To guide someone, one needs seeing eyes and must not be blind to the truth oneself. Whoever is closed off to the Word of God, like the Sermon on the Mount, cannot see what the will of God is, which is expressed in the Word of God. And thus, the Pharisees could not truly recognize the meaning of the Word of God, because they were not seeking and researching the truth hidden in the Word of God at all. Since the Pharisees were not truly interested in the content of God's commandments, they placed the letter of the law above the true meaning of the commandments and taught that their established moral rules and human precepts were the true fulfillment of the commandments. They corrupted people by teaching them that only rules mattered and nothing else. So they taught that the **outward form of the commandments was everything**. Thus, they incited to sin and lovelessness and encouraged the condemnation of those who did not observe all the rules, although these were often human traditions. If we compare this biblical picture of the Pharisees with the attitude of the adherents of cheap grace, it becomes clear: Adherents of cheap grace also like to display their piety outwardly, and they too do not look at the true meaning of divine instructions regarding the Christian faith and are **blind to the truth of the Gospel**. They are closed off to the Word of God as well as the truth of

the Gospel. They appear devout, but are not, for they inwardly think: Grace is given to us so that God reserves a place for us in heaven. All we need to do is order the place reservation with a prayer of conversion, and then our salvation is secure. God does not see our anti-God sinful attitude under grace. Therefore, we rebel against His Word, which calls us to repent. If we act pious enough, we will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Their image of God is so ungodly that they believe they can enter the Kingdom of Heaven through hypocrisy, in which they also resemble the Pharisees. (The hypocrisy of the Pharisees, among other things, showed itself through their double standards in interpreting the Sabbath commandment, which Jesus criticized, and their tendency not to admit serious violations of the Law, while adhering to unimportant regulations for boasting and show.) And so, adherents of cheap grace overlook the meaning of the Gospel because they **adapt scripture to their preconceptions due to a lack of humility**. They do not allow scripture to convict them of their own inadequacy and thus also overlook their self-righteousness, which from a biblical perspective leads to hell. Due to their self-righteousness, they also like to present themselves as wise. They often claim to be teachers called by God, who supposedly proclaim the true Gospel on behalf of God.

Adherents of cheap grace thus **abuse scripture to adapt it to their belief in a cheap gospel**. They adapt scripture to their concept of righteousness and their image of God. Thus, they do not recognize what scripture is speaking about. The Pharisees did the same, for they did not see what scripture truly conveys. So Jesus accused them of claiming to know scripture and yet denying Him. They should have recognized Jesus as the Messiah if they had taken scripture truly seriously, as scripture testifies of Him as the Messiah. But they could not accept Jesus as the Messiah because their hearts were hard. They wanted a Messiah who would not dispute their throne, from which they judged and condemned others. And what about adherents of cheap grace? Adherents of cheap grace could recognize from scripture that it testifies of a Messiah who never gives away cheap salvation and only has a costly grace to offer. But they do not recognize that scripture testifies of a Messiah who never promised cheap grace. They **twist and pervert scripture** and look for Bible verses that they tear out of context to apply them against the truth of the Gospel. They thus construct a Jesus and a "dear God" according to their own ideas, which corresponds to their fantasy. This fantasy god mocks the true God. And not infrequently, adherents of cheap grace proclaim that they know the true God of the Bible and try to convince people of their fantasy god.

The Pharisees also believed that they were authorized by God to convey an image of God that mocks the true God. They taught a God who is pedantic and would condemn almost everyone. They claimed to be the mouthpiece of this God. Through their teaching, the biblical image of God was not brought to light, but obscured. At the same time, the Pharisees placed their human wisdom above the truth of scripture and boldly claimed that they were proclaiming the truth. They were thus very self-

absorbed and convinced of what they were saying, as they were totally deluded and did not realize how much they were deceiving themselves. Their outwardly shining righteousness was only **appearance and not being**, for it consisted of a feigned godliness, although they had no relationship with God. Adherents of cheap grace also believe that their outward godliness and their dead faith would be sufficient to be righteous.

They base their righteousness on their human opinions. But true Christians base their righteousness on the only true foundation, namely Jesus. But they cannot build on Jesus because they do not know Him and replace Him with a fantasy Jesus. They **mask their lack of godliness with their outward piety** and consider themselves righteous because they are very proud of their religiosity. The Pharisees also prided themselves greatly on their piety or on their dead faith in God. We find this vanity again in adherents of cheap grace. Their vanity is remarkable, since they know the Bible and could therefore recognize that they do not live nearly as devoted to God as the early Christians, especially since they lack any devotion to God. No less vain were certainly the Pharisees. The Pharisees, however, unlike the adherents of cheap grace, appeared to be law-abiding and acted as if they were true doers of the Word of God. They acted as if they took God's commandments seriously. This was part of their acting and hypocrisy. In their hypocrisy, they used double standards, breaking the law themselves and pretending to observe the law. They did not admit their lawbreaking and interpreted the law in such a way that all their sins seemed justified. Through their interpretation of the law, they legitimized their own moral behavior, so that they appeared righteous.

Thus, they portrayed themselves as better than the supposed sinners. In this characteristic, too, they resemble **lawless adherents of cheap grace**. For they too interpret scripture in such a way that they appear pious and good. They presume to be better and more righteous than "normal sinners" who do not adorn themselves with the name Christian. They act as if they live in harmony with God and scripture. They arrange everything in such a way that they can say they obey God's will by believing in the Gospel. They convince themselves that they are righteous according to the Word of God because they distort and twist it so much that they are supposedly good, and thus they **consider themselves righteous and are as arrogant as the Pharisees**. They are also sure that their sins would not matter, concealing them under their pious cloak, showing no legalistic piety. In this there is, outwardly, a great difference to the Pharisees, who were legalistic fanatics and kept laws to appear better than the so-called great sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes.

Adherents of cheap grace who believe they are saved because of their outward piety are anything but "legalistic fanatics" like the Pharisees, who meticulously observed regulations for the sake of rules. For they believe in the abolition of the commandments and do not seek recognition from God through keeping commandments, as was the case with the

Pharisees. Moreover, from their own perspective, they do not need to conceal their sins or their lawlessness by pedantically observing ridiculous rules like tithing kitchen herbs. They do not try to pretend righteousness through keeping commandments. Therefore, they do not proclaim human traditions that distract from the meaning of the Law, the commandment of love, and lead to an unmerciful legalistic morality. But they too, like the Pharisees, **disregard the commandment of love**, for they prefer to look at their own rules and norms, which correspond to their Christian tradition, instead of the commandment of love, which Jesus cherished. They too lack the righteousness inscribed in Jesus' love, which makes us willing servants of God and doers of the Word. That their lawlessness is openly lived out because they appeal to cheap grace and justify themselves solely on the basis of their "faith" is the only true difference from the Pharisees, for the Pharisees were just as lawless as the adherents of cheap grace.

They overlooked that the commandments refer to Jesus, which is why, like the adherents of cheap grace, they could not find living faith. This fact becomes clear when we consider the properties of the Law. Jesus said that the Pharisees overlooked three important properties of the Law, namely, first, **mercy**, for one of the three properties of the Law is that it demands mercy. Secondly, a property of the Law is that it **convicts us as sinners** because it demands mercy. The Pharisees willfully overlooked this property out of self-righteousness. The third property of the Law is that it implicitly calls us to **faith in Jesus**, because it points us to Jesus as the moral goal of all commandments and as the ultimate goal of divine righteousness and makes us realize that we have no righteousness.

The three properties of the Law are thus **mercy, the exercise of judgment, and the call to faith**. Thus, God's Law characterizes mercy, His wrath over sin, which leads to judgment. And at the same time, the Law is a tutor leading to Jesus and invites faith in Jesus, as all commandments refer to Him. The Pharisees willfully overlooked these properties of the Law. That is why Jesus told the Pharisees that they disregard the most important things in the Law: namely, justice, mercy, and faithfulness. So we read in Matthew 23:23: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." Adherents of cheap grace also do not recognize what God's Law wants to tell them, for the Law tells them through these three properties that they should turn to Jesus. Under the guise of a humble faith, they pretend that they have accepted Jesus through faith and are converted. But a true conversion to Jesus presupposes that we repent of our sins by letting the Law judge us. To build a relationship with Jesus, it is therefore also important to acknowledge His Word, as He is inseparably connected with His Word. Whoever does not want to live according to Jesus' commandments does not love Jesus and does not know Him, according to John's words. Adherents of cheap grace, who despise Jesus' commandments, say they have a relationship with Jesus. But scripture

says that a relationship with Jesus is not compatible with lawlessness, because love and obedience to Jesus belong together. Thus, adherents of cheap grace only have a **fake relationship with Jesus**. For they do not love Jesus. Whoever loves Jesus also wants to live according to His will and thus according to His Word, like the Sermon on the Mount. And the love for Him flows into obedience to His Word, because love and obedience cannot be separated from each other.

It thus generally testifies to a rejection of Jesus if we do not want to live according to the Word of God. Whoever lives in a relationship with Jesus or is even just open to a relationship with Jesus will by no means deny His Word, as lawless Christians do. And since they deny the Word of God, they want a cheap salvation, do not see their sinfulness and their need for redemption from sin. Therefore, they also do not find saving faith, which leads to a relationship with Jesus.

So they too overlook the three things that the Law is meant to convey. They overlook the Law's reference to mercy, the Law's reference that one's own righteousness must be judged, and the Law's reference that we need grace for our salvation. And thus their self-deception goes so far that they attach the label Christian to themselves, although they do not even realize their need for redemption because they deny Christ as the goal of the commandments. Their entire faith life is thus based on **outward appearances without inner substance**, because they have no true faith at all. Their turning to Jesus does not happen out of humility and self-condemnation, but out of egoism. They want to derive personal advantages from their "faith" in Jesus. They feel obliged to show their faith outwardly, precisely because they inwardly have no connection to Jesus.

So they usually read the Bible a lot, although they reject its content, following the example of the Pharisees. Reading the Bible and praying is usually a ritual for them. These rituals may appear pious, but they are merely pseudo-Christian customs that occur habitually. By cultivating Christian rituals, adherents of cheap grace cling to their pious rules instead of clinging to Christ. Their pious deeds serve to replace the missing relationship with God and ultimately to **feign a Christian appearance**. They ultimately cannot truly live out their faith in Jesus because they have a dead faith. Therefore, they automatically and subconsciously adopt Christian structures in their faith life. In other words: They adapt to Christianity and its customs to "breathe spiritual life" into their piety. So they act very spiritual. But they cannot be spiritual because they live in the flesh. Thus, their outwardly spiritual activities like praying and reading the Bible are hypocrisy and dead pious works and rehearsed rituals.

Adherents of cheap grace thus often behave like true Christians because they want to appear pious and feel bound by certain Christian rules. However, they do not serve Jesus, but their pious rules, which they place above Jesus, because they lack a relationship with Him. Thus, adherents

of cheap grace resemble the Pharisees, who only followed rigid rules instead of questioning them and researching God's will behind them. Pharisaic legalism was about appearing outwardly correct. They clung to rules to maintain a devout appearance or to conceal their lack of godliness. Adherents of cheap grace also do much to conceal their lack of godliness. They claim to love Jesus and act according to pious rules to distinguish themselves as Christians. But they lack sincerity, because, like the Pharisees, they lack a relationship with God and Jesus. Only those who stand in love with Jesus can truly dedicate their pious activities to Jesus. Thus, without a relationship with Jesus, we can never think or act sincerely Christianly, but only practice outward Christian behaviors.

Christian behavior patterns (like praying, confessions of faith, or Bible reading without a relationship with Jesus) therefore only give us a Christian appearance, but no Christian Christian being. And of course, we are not Christians if we have no relationship with Jesus. Without a relationship with Jesus, we will therefore never be righteous before God, no matter how many pious rules we observe. (For God's Word says that the outward impression is not decisive.) We should therefore truly testify to Christ in our entire life practice of faith and not just behave outwardly like a Christian in certain respects. Therefore: We can read the Bible every day, pray every day, and do all sorts of things that are demanded in the Word of God. But all this does not make us a Christian if the **heart does not agree with our actions**. Why does the Bible emphasize that the redeemed are those who worship God in spirit and truth?

Because there are many who worship God not from the heart, but only outwardly. Outwardly, they may even say the same things as serious Christians. They may praise God with their lips, but deny Him with their hearts. Jesus told the Pharisees that they belong to this class of people because their praise did not come from the heart, but only from the lips. True praise, on the other hand, happens in the **spirit of truth**. The spirit of truth is the Spirit of Jesus, who unconditionally surrenders to God's will without selfishness. Where selfishness prevails, there is no worship of God in the spirit of truth. Therefore: In everything we do, our heart should be pure; for everything we do should proceed from Jesus or the spirit of truth. This spirit of worship seeks God's glory, and all who are circumcised in heart and truly oriented towards holiness possess this spirit of worship. Paul said in essence: To the pure, everything is holy.

The pure want to do everything for the glory of God - whether they eat, sleep, or go to work. Likewise, according to Paul, to the impure or those who do not love Jesus and who are without the heart of the New Covenant, nothing is holy. They may pretend to be intent on holiness by participating in Christian life and, for example, taking communion. But that does them no good. Quite the contrary. Paul said in essence: Those who do not receive communion in the right attitude must answer for it. We must not dishonor God's sacraments, and through hypocrisy we cannot draw blessings from them. Finally, Jesus himself said: "**Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy**" (Luke 12:1). And so

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount distinguished a true discipleship that requires devotion and passion from the hypocritical piety of the Pharisees. He said clearly: If we do not want to live for Him from the heart, but only pretend that we love Him, we obviously live "in the heaven of the Pharisees." It is obvious that adherents of cheap grace live in the heaven of the Pharisees and are the modern Pharisees of our time. Instead of practicing an exaggerated, rule-abiding, displayed legalism like the Pharisees, they use **Christian behavior patterns** by clinging to Christian traditions and norms like celebrating Christian festivals and reading the Bible, to distract from their egoism through their pious theater. They want to feign righteousness and a Christian life through religious practices. In doing so, they try to harness God to the cart of their self-righteousness by demonstrating their godliness through prayers, lip service, and pious acts, although they want nothing more than cheap grace from God and are not interested in God Himself at all. They put a Christian label on their lives and pretend to have a relationship with Jesus by claiming to love Christ and believe in Him. But these are just Christianly disguised religious knowledge and in truth nothing but empty lip service, for loving Jesus means more than confessing Him with the lips and believing in Him intellectually.

In summary: The only difference between the adherents of cheap grace and the Pharisees is that they are not openly legalistic and do not zealously adhere to rules. On the contrary, they like to emphasize that they do not want to follow any legal rules, reject legalism, and are therefore lawless. Their lawlessness seems to be in greatest contrast to the legalism of the Pharisees, who struggled to adhere to many legal regulations.

But this seeming contrast between the Pharisees and adherents of cheap grace is insignificant upon closer inspection. For the Pharisees were just as fundamentally lawless with regard to God's commandments as the adherents of cheap grace, because their legalism missed the point of God's commandments. They did not keep God's commandments, but human traditions. Thus, their legalism was **camouflaged lawlessness**, "beautified" by outward perfectionism. The legalism of the Pharisees, as well as the obvious lawlessness of the adherents of cheap grace, provoke the wrath of God and come from the **same source**. This source is the rebellious flesh, which is stubborn, self-righteous, and lawless. The legalism of the Pharisees ultimately did not worship God and His moral law, but their own paragraphs, which were even intended to undermine the moral law. In observing their numerous rules, they limited themselves to a service according to regulations, which was an expression of their contempt for the divine commandments.

Many fail to recognize that the Pharisees were precisely those who were lawless in Jesus' eyes, for they outwardly strove to meticulously obey the Torah. The Bible, however, explicitly tells us that they were even more sinful and lawless than supposedly great sinners who had obviously violated the Torah. The **outward perfectionism of the Pharisees**

ultimately served only to conceal their own sinfulness and imperfection. Whoever truly wants to live perfectly and become perfect must engage with Jesus and follow Him. Only then do we have a claim to enter the Kingdom of God. That is why Jesus told the rich young ruler that he should follow Him to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He also told him that he would thereby become perfect. Thus, Jesus called for a true perfection that comes from the innermost heart and is in complete contrast to the perfectionistic-looking legalism of the Pharisees.

Do James and Paul Contradict Each Other?

James said that Abraham was righteous not only because he believed God, but because he was **obedient out of faith** and did works pleasing to God. See: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that **faith was active along with his works, and by works faith was perfected**; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God." In Romans 4, Paul spoke of Abraham being justified by his faith, and his righteousness coming not from works, but from faith. James, on the other hand, clearly states that his faith alone would not have justified him without works pleasing to God or without active obedience. These statements seem to contradict each other. However, both have a different perspective. For James, it's about the connection between faith and its actions.

James said: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and by works faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God." After this discourse, James is clearly concerned with the question of **how living faith, which justifies before God, manifests itself**, and he concludes that it expresses itself in deeds. Paul, on the other hand, in Romans 4, deals with the question of **how a person who has not yet come to faith can be justified**. In this context, he referred to Abraham and said: "How could Abraham, the progenitor of our Jewish people, stand before God? Because of his good deeds? With these, he could have gained fame and respect among people, but not with God. The Holy Scripture says: 'Abraham put his whole trust in God, and so he found God's approval.' It is like this: If I do a work, I have a right to wages. It is not a gift, but I have earned it. But with God it is different. With Him, I will achieve nothing if I rely on my deeds. Only if I trust God, who acquits the ungodly of their guilt, can I stand before Him." As the context shows, Paul in Romans 4 was not referring to works of faith. He was therefore not referring to the works of which James spoke and which flow from faith, when he essentially said: If you build on your works, then you are not building on grace, are not living in it, and must justify yourselves by the reward of your works. Here, Paul was referring to works from which a person wants to earn or work out their own reward. Thus, the works mentioned in Romans 4 are

works done in faith in one's own righteousness and are not based on grace.

For logical reasons alone, the works mentioned in Romans 4 cannot be works of faith. For these are, even according to Paul, in harmony with grace, indeed, even a fruit of grace that characterizes true faith. Paul in Romans 4 was therefore obviously referring to **human-made works**, so-called works of law, which a person performs in unbelief in the work of Jesus for self-justification, and therefore Paul contrasted these works with grace. Thus, Romans 4 is not about the connection between faith and works that come from faith and identify it as genuine. Rather, Romans 4 is about the question of whether human-made achievements, so-called works of law or human-made works, are necessary for justification before God, or whether **faith alone justifies**, which brings forth good works, of which James spoke? Romans 4 is therefore about the question: Does our righteousness before God result entirely from faith? Or are human-made deeds, so-called works of law, necessary for justification before God in addition to faith (or instead of faith)? In Romans 4, we find the answer to this question, for Paul answers it for us as follows: We should build our righteousness entirely on faith and thus entirely on grace. **Only living faith justifies.** Human-made deeds and merits do not justify, for they never lead to a righteous standing before God and bring no glory. And Paul clarified this truth in Romans 4 by the example of Abraham. For he, too, was declared righteous entirely on the basis of his living faith, for all his pious deeds would have been worthless without faith in God. Thus Abraham was justified by faith, which does not change the fact that his obedience testified to his faith-righteousness and proved his faith to be living and genuine. So Abraham, because of his faith-righteousness, was devoted to God and obedient to Him according to Hebrews 11. Otherwise, his faith would have been dead in itself and would have brought him no righteousness. This truth is confirmed in Hebrews 11:17. There Paul pointed out that Abraham offered his son as a sacrifice because God demanded it of him. So Abraham obviously proved his faith through his obedience, even according to Paul, by placing Isaac on the altar to sacrifice him for God with a heavy heart. And in this sense, James explains to us that Abraham's obedience perfected his faith, because Abraham's faith would not have been pleasing to God and perfect if it had not brought about obedience. And so James said the following: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and by works faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone."

Summary: James is concerned with the connection between **living faith and deeds**. He made it clear that saving faith involves action, because many thought that a dead faith, which brings no obedience and no good

works, would save. Thus James said that a faith without works of faith, or a faith without active obedience, is dead and cannot save. Paul was also clear that **true and saving faith**, which Abraham exemplified, also includes and characterizes **deeds of obedience and good works**. Therefore, he did not contradict James. He wanted to clarify that **pure faith is the basis of our righteousness before God**, which in turn brings forth the good deeds of which James spoke. Paul therefore never separated Abraham's faith-righteousness from his good deeds, as one might think. He saw the works of faith, of which James spoke, rather included in his faith-righteousness. That Abraham placed Isaac on the altar was, after all, nothing other than a step of faith or a work of faith according to Hebrews 11. Works of faith are, even according to Paul, an expression of Abraham's righteousness and included in Abraham's faith-righteousness, because for Paul, too, works of faith, obedience, and faith form a unity. He only clarified that Abraham's righteousness before God ultimately came entirely from faith, since he would never have been justified by doing works alone (without faith), especially since he could only perform good works and active obedience by virtue of faith.

A Note on "Faith Alone" and Martin Luther

Lastly, I want to note that a sentence was misrepresented by Luther. He simply inserted the word "allein" (alone) into the following verse from Romans 3:28: "So we hold that one is justified **by faith alone** apart from works of the law." Luther had added "alone" here; it is not in the original text. Thus, one often reads that justification by grace happens *sola fide* and that we are justified and declared righteous by faith alone. And certainly, the saying: "We are justified by faith alone" is also correct if we speak of **true faith**, which is always connected with the fruit of good works and sanctification. However, since a distinction is often not made between genuine and dead faith, this saying can lead to the false belief in a cheap grace. So it is important to understand: Certainly, we are justified and declared righteous before God by **living faith alone** without the addition of human "merits" like human-made works of the law. But the faith that alone justifies us never comes alone, for it brings with it sanctifying grace and leads to a Christian lifestyle and good works. Thus, it is confusing when preachers suggest that faith alone justifies and is sufficient for the kingdom of heaven. It would be better if they would say: Not our human merits and human-made works can justify us in the slightest before God. Nothing but **true and living faith** can justify us before God, which brings forth the fruit of good works. The expression: "Faith alone justifies us" is confusing because it possibly leads to the idea that faith also comes alone without good works and would thus justify in a dead state without the fruit of good deeds. However, it is fundamentally important for a true understanding of grace to understand that true and justifying faith never comes alone, but brings its good works with it and shows itself in a sanctified lifestyle.

Moreover, I would like to point out that Lutherans, in particular, often do not understand that, according to the Bible, **lawlessness is injustice and sin**. For in places where the Bible warns against lawlessness and where all good translations, like the Elberfelder, speak of lawlessness, the Luther Bible uses "injustice." Luther deliberately replaced the word "lawlessness" or the verb "lawless" with "injustice" or "unjust." So Luther was also a fallible human being who also wrote anti-Semitic texts. Therefore, I want to point out that Lutherans, in particular, are misled and tend to separate saving faith in Jesus from good works and keeping the commandments. They also often overlook the warnings of James, as they certainly have no special relevance in Luther's writings. After all, Luther was so upset when reading James's text that he called his warnings about a dead faith a "straw epistle."

Obedience Must Not Be Confused with Works-Righteousness

Proponents of cheap grace say that the willingness to obey Jesus would automatically lead to works-righteousness, thereby supposedly causing us to fall from grace. In the following text, I want to explain why this statement cannot be true, because nowhere in the Bible is it said that obedience is works-righteousness or that we would fall from grace if we are obedient to God. The Bible merely says that we should not try to earn our salvation by means of our human obedience. The Bible warns us against thinking that we can please God through our human and "fleshly" obedience, and tells us that we must crucify our flesh to please God. However, the Bible demands **true obedience**, which is brought about by God, for it distinguishes us as Christians who have crucified their flesh and live in the Spirit. The Spirit of God is subject to God's will. Thus, as spiritual people, we live in an attitude of obedience that comes from faith and practice **so-called obedient faith**, which is brought about by grace, by taking Jesus' will to heart and acting accordingly. And thus, through our willingness to practice obedient faith, we can never fall from grace, because obedience from faith pleases God and is brought about by Him. This is indisputable. Otherwise, the obedient faith that Abraham exercised would not have been pleasing to God. And this is far from human self-righteousness and self-righteous works-righteousness, but rather desirable according to the Bible. Such obedience, which comes from faith, is naturally not to be equated with the hypocritical works-righteousness that the Pharisees exemplified under a facade of godliness and which the Bible condemns. We are therefore works-righteous only if we do not live in faith and content ourselves with righteousness from our human works and rely on our human obedience.

However, the Pharisees show us that such obedience is not genuine; they were disobedient and yet outwardly kept many of God's commandments. Obedient faith, however, is the absolute opposite of the Pharisaical obedience that was mere appearance and not being, for obedient faith means, as said, to truly obey God. As long as we base our righteousness on Jesus and genuinely want to obey Him out of faith, like Abraham, we are therefore not practicing works-righteousness, but imitating **Abraham's obedient faith**. So whoever wants to be obedient out of faith after the example of Abraham wants to honor God through an obedient faith that is not an accessory to grace, but a **result of grace**. Such obedience logically does not serve one's own self-justification and Pharisaical boasting. It therefore does not serve self-salvation and never happens in order to provide an accessory to grace.

Ultimately, obedient faith is not about earning heaven through self-performed works independent of grace or doing human-made works to supplement grace. Obedient faith is about doing **works by the power of grace** that honor God and correspond to His will. Only those who consecrate their lives to the Good Shepherd exercise obedient faith. They are Jesus' sheep and the true believers according to Scripture. They are precisely those who rely entirely on Jesus and do nothing separated from their Shepherd. They do not possess a religious faith that withdraws from Jesus' authority out of self-righteousness and arrogance, but a **humble faith** that looks away from oneself to the Shepherd and brings forth obedience. Their obedience leads to good works, so-called works of faith, and testifies to their salvation. After all, all of Jesus' sheep who belong to Christ's flock practice obedient faith because they have left the way of the world to follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Jesus' sheep turn to Jesus as the Good Shepherd so that He may lead their ways in obedient faith, and they live under His protection and guidance. Therefore, no hostile power can take possession of them, for a good Shepherd protects His sheep. Jesus compared Himself to a shepherd who stands before the sheep when hostile opponents want to kill them. He said that His sheep are those who are safe in His hand and thus belong entirely to the Shepherd. And since sheep are loyal and obedient animals who follow their Shepherd blindly in absolute trust, it is clear: We are in Jesus' hand if we follow Jesus blindly like sheep follow their Shepherd and should join His flock of sheep, for as His sheep, we walk pleasing to God and obey the voice of God like Abraham, which brought him blessings. According to Jesus, Jesus' sheep do not listen to any foreign voice, but only to that of the Shepherd. Jesus' sheep therefore do not consider their own ways and do not listen to voices that come from the world. They therefore also do not listen to the voice of their ego, for they have crucified their ego and thus they have given up their self-righteousness.

The true sheep of Jesus, who are His only chosen ones, reject any works-righteousness, for they only want to do works that the Good Shepherd works in them. They do not seek their own ways to become righteous before God, and thus they do not try to become righteous by their own strength and by their own performance and are not even tempted to be

works-righteous, for they build their righteousness and all their actions solely on the Shepherd Jesus. They submit to the dominion of the Good Shepherd, because they want to live and act only under His dominion and guidance. They therefore do not build their salvation on their own works, but on faith. They build on the works that flow from faith and that God has prepared in His grace, so that they walk in good works that are predestined by God (see Ephesians). And so they are the only true believers who rely on Jesus and follow their Christian calling. In conclusion, it can be said that it is truly nonsense to dismiss obedient faith and the doing of true good works after the example of Jesus as works-righteousness. However, proponents of cheap grace often (intentionally or unintentionally) confuse true obedient faith, which manifests itself in merciful action and deeds of trust in God, with works-righteousness.